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IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

AUGUST, 1954 35¢

PHANTOM WORLD

by Daniel F. Galouye



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Introducing the



A U T H O R



Carl Jacobi



THE microbe *science-fictionus-fantasicus* thrust its mandibles into me at a comparatively early age. I sold my first fantasy story while an under-classman at the University of Minnesota, but before that I had arranged my extra-curricular reading to include off-the-trail fiction and the works of Jeans and others. On the campus I edited the *Minnesota Quarterly*, college literary magazine and irritated the English department no end by writing a series of detective stories for that rather staid periodical. After school I took a turn at newspaper reporting serving as legman (and later re-write man) on *The Minneapolis Star*.

Freelancing loomed more attractive than the regular hours of the

city room, and I placed my typewriter in an office over a bank, hung a do-not-disturb sign on the door and went to work. Unfortunately friends with an equal amount of spare time saw in the office an ideal club room in which to gossip about their failures or successes on the golf links. The result was that while the checks continued to pass through the bank downstairs, a declining quantity filtered into my mail box.

For a couple of years I held the editorial chair of *Midwest Media*, an advertising and radio trade journal. Chair is not strictly accurate; it was more of a galley oar, for I wrote under a half dozen pseudonyms every blessed word in the magazine.

Came "war and rumors of war"
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The Editorial

LAST month we announced the forthcoming companion magazine to IMAGINATION. This month we're happy to inform you that you can buy the first issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES at your favorite newsdealer now!

IMAGINATIVE TALES is something in the nature of an experiment. We actually don't know whether it's a magazine or paperback book in magazine form. Each issue we will publish a book-length novel or at most two shorter length novels. Each issue will contain the work of one author only. In this respect you might call IMAGINATIVE TALES a "pocket-book" except that the size and general format will be the same as IMAGINATION. But actually, whether IMAGINATIVE TALES is called a "pocket-book" or not doesn't matter. The important thing is that you'll have a new addition to your science-fiction-fantasy library.

FOR the first number of IMAGINATIVE TALES you'll find a book-length TOFFEE novel by Charles F. Myers. For those of you familiar with the work of Mr. Myers nothing more need be said. For those of you who are not, we'll simply state that if you have ever been a fan of Thorne Smith you'll find that Charlie Myers has deservedly been referred to as having taken up and worn well the man-

tle of the late master. TOFFEE stories have all the spice, humor, and clever science-fantasy of the type of writing that Thorne Smith made world famous. So for an uproariously funny piece of science-fantasy reading, don't miss the first issue—or number if you will—of IMAGINATIVE TALES, now on sale. And by all means drop us a line and let us know what you think of the first number.

BEFORE closing shop for this month we'd like also to call your attention to the terrific free book offer on page 130. This necessarily has to be a limited offer, so if you want any of the books, act at once! See you next month.



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Benjamin Franklin



Isaac Newton



Francis Bacon

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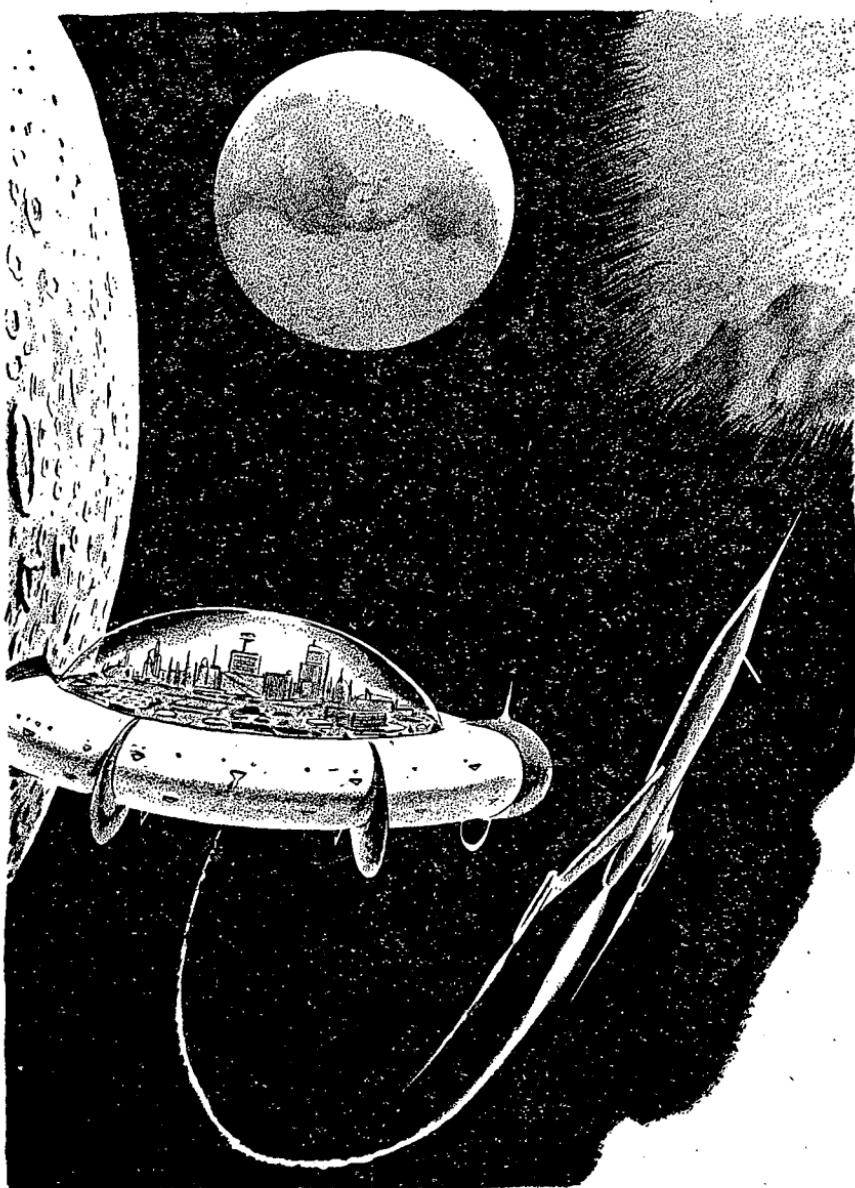
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Faster than light speed could be a potent weapon in time of war; Rand's job as a colonist spy was to achieve it, which he did, finding a —

PHANTOM WORLD

By

Daniel F. Galouye

THE air in the assembly room was ominously still. Only the tense breathing of the scores who packed the small compartment was audible. Lieutenant Rand Jordan was rigid in his chair, not daring to let his eyes wander for fear someone might interpret the restlessness as a furtive gesture.

As did the others, he stared forward anxiously. Captain Sanders

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stood hesitatingly in front of the desk surveying the electro-technicians, mechanics, shipfitters—officers and men alike.

"Of course," Sanders shrugged, "no one in Test is under suspicion. We are informing you there is an enemy agent aboard Satellite City so that you may be on the alert for any eventuality in Operation Light Barrier."

Inwardly, Rand shrank in apprehension and winced under the force of discomfort bordering on pain—a force over which he had no control. Outwardly, he was calm, almost bored.

Commander Clarkson sat rubbing his chin pensively behind the desk. "Am I to understand, Captain, that my men are to place the project secondary to spy hunting?"

Sanders answered without turning around. "By no means. You are rather to expedite your work. However, at the same time you are to exercise constant vigilance while Security concentrates on the —spy hunt, as you call it."

Any expression of relief that Rand might have displayed was totally smothered. But it had to be that way. For the factors that insured his outward look of composure were beyond his control.

Ensign Drake shifted in the adjacent chair and turned to face him.

"For a moment," he laughed, "I thought this was going to be the beginning of the inquisition."

Rand did not answer. In the intense vigil for the first indication of his unmasking, there was no respite for trivialities.

"Naturally," the Captain continued, "we assume the spy will be unveiled and captured." His eyes became small, hard piercing. "Should any of you men be the instrument of capture," he went on bitterly, "you will, of course, not be held responsible for any eruption of emotion that might lead to his immediate death."

He placed cruel emphasis on the last two words and his teeth were clamped together; his lips flared back, as he went on:

"Security has captured spies before. The last was only a few weeks ago. The librarian and I can vouch for the fact that it is damned frustrating to watch them die even before they can be questioned!

"Since their psycho-impulse destructors are most efficient, we have abandoned hope of holding any of them for more than ten minutes—alive. So I don't see why we shouldn't get the satisfaction of executing them summarily, before they become the victims of their involuntary suicide compulsion."

The threat of suspicion had obviously passed. Rand relaxed.

The pangs of synthetic endocrinal stimulants — some deadly, some merely intended to hone his mental and physical reflexes to a fine degree of readiness—were diminishing.

"Goddam Colonists!" Sanders snarled in a low but still unrestrained voice. The flesh above his stiff collar was red and puffed and he was trembling quietly with rage.

"But we'll crush them!" His fist rammed the desk. "We'll crush them like we should have when they first broke loose!"

He turned brusquely and strode from the room as chair legs skittered and men rose to attention. Ignoring Clarkson's stiff salute, he slammed the metal door after him.

The Commander rose. "Lieutenant Jordan!" he called out.

Rand convulsed inwardly with alarm as an electrical shock raced agonizingly through his every nerve. He cursed the synthetic gland of which the psycho-impulse destructor, as Sanders called it, was only a minor adjunct. He cursed the autacoidal hell that it sent coursing through his body at the slightest indication of danger. He damned the thousand and one forms of psychosomatic torture he had felt under its hateful grip.

But he fought the excruciations and rose, steadily, unruffled.

"As pilot of Test Ship Number

Two," Clarkson addressed him, "your responsibility is more severe than anyone else's . . ."

The inner tortures subsided. The synthetic gland returned to inactivity.

" . . . You will see to it," Clarkson continued, "that the guard around Number Two is doubled. It appears now that the loss of the first test ship might not have been accidental. Considering the unavailability of other craft, the continuation of this project depends, for the present at least, on the adequate protection of Number Two."

RAND jockeyed against the starting lurch of the public conveyor as he headed down its central aisle and sidled into a seat.

The vehicle turned on a radial route aimed at the hub of Satellite City rolling toward the nearby civilian residential area that surrounded the commercial central zone. Overhead, beyond the great transparent dome, sun, stars and crescent moon shone in a blaze of celestial magnificence.

But he closed his eyes on the spectacle of cosmic brilliancy and slumped indifferently in the seat.

He was afraid, but he couldn't tremble. Secretions that weren't of human origin subdued such outward displays of betraying emotions.

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For a moment—but only for a moment—he damned the thoroughness of his Colonist government's espionage system. For the smallest part of a second, he conjured up the picture of some rustic, mountainous retreat where he would never be concerned with the horrors and unbearable anxiety of interworld intrigue. He wanted to forget about spy and counterspy, and he wondered whether there would ever be an end to the relentless, nerve-twisting vigilance over which he had no control.

But the alluring thoughts were wrenching away in a surge of pain as supersecretions lashed at him. The vehicle, bucking as it stopped at the first station in the civilian area, jogged him further away from his thoughts and he found comfort in the permissible conviction that the quicker the war started, the sooner would the race heal its wounds as a single entity. Perhaps even the secret of light-plus speed—the ability to stab out with a fleet and strike in advance of the swiftest message that could reach the target area—would force the end to a frustrating stalemate.

"You might invite me to sit with you."

He looked up. Carol Sanders stood smiling in the aisle, steadyng herself against the motion of the vehicle with a grip on the handrail.

Rand tensed. He wasn't sure of her yet. He wasn't even certain the Captain *had* a daughter.

"I'm sorry about last night." He made room on the seat and helped her in. "Had to go over a procedure drill. When I got through, it was too late."

"Too late to see me?" She smiled and, with a tilt of her head, tossed a shock of red hair out of the way over her shoulder. "Or too late for a lieutenant to come calling at the home of a tired captain?"

He laughed, but did not answer. Instead he tried not to be too obvious in studying her features. Again, he could find no physical resemblance between her and the Satellite's naval chief who had rasped his tirade against the Colonists through drawn lips.

"The flight's tomorrow, isn't it?" she asked thoughtfully.

He nodded.

"Rand," she said hesitatingly, "I—I wish you didn't have to go."

"Nonsense," he chided. "There's no danger."

"But, that other ship!"

"It's different now. All the bugs are out."

"That's what McGough said before he tested Number One."

HE thought of the big, amiable pilot who had been more than a companion during the year they

had spent together in Satellite City.

"No. That's not right. He knew there were a few kinks in the converter arrangement. That's why he failed to reach the barrier on the first two flights. He didn't think the kinks were cause for alarm, though."

"But," she turned seriously toward him, "maybe it wasn't the converter. Maybe whatever was wrong with that other ship is still wrong with Number Two."

"I'll be all right," he insisted, patting her hand.

Her eyes were blue. Captain Sanders' were brown. The picture he had seen of the Captain's late wife showed brown eyes too . . .

"Oh, Rand! When is this all going to be over? When are we going to stop seeing who can get the most horrible weapon first?"

"Not until we bring this seething bitterness out into open conflict." He said it unemotionally. "Not until the Colonist leaders are brought to trial and Earth governors are seated once more over the provinces." It was the only way he could say it to win the sanction of the glandular monitor that pressed in on his brain at the base of his skull.

"Why?" She frowned in confusion, "Why do we have to fight them? They're human too. Maybe they have a right to their independence—the freedom they gain-

ed in the Great War."

Every organ in his body jolted as a score of warning signals were touched off by epithelial secretions from the synthetic hormone modifier. Bait casting! his pounding pulse shouted. And all the while, the inner tenseness, the biting mental anxiety, sharpened his perspicacity, his straining reflexes, to a keen edge of painful alertness.

But, through no control of his own, he hid the inner turmoil. "We should forget about fighting them?" He laughed. "When we know that even now they have their test base Satellite with twice as large a complement or personnel—all straining to break the light barrier before we do?"

She sighed.

The seething, synthesized activity in his body abated. He had refused the bait—resisted entrapment!

"But still," she shuddered, "it all seems so barbaric! How I hate it all!"

If only there were some way he could find out! It was torture to be the victim of his body's implanted danger signal system just because he was thrown into contact with this girl whom he suspected might be a counteragent.

If only he could eliminate the possibility that she might be trying to trap him! Then his body would not react so painfully to

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what he might only be imagining were attempts to ensnare him.

He looked at her soft features, the flowing, artistic lines of her face, the flash of her even, white teeth as she smiled up at him. Then he realized there were other reasons why he would like to remove her from his field of suspicion.

SATELLITE City had long become only a dim luminary obscured in the backwash of Number Two's normal drive jets as he sent the ship curving up and out of the plane of the Solar System, steadyng on a course perpendicular to the ecliptic.

Number Two was a stripped down attack craft, converted for test duty. Her three pilot docks were like upright, spring-supported and padded cradles, all in a row. Rand, secured by a harness, occupied the central one.

He flicked a switch marked 'psycho-control.' The manual control panel retracted, hiding itself in the forward bulkhead and leaving only bare metal before him.

"Ready for checkoff?" Greg Drake's voice, more like a mouthful of static came through the communicator.

"Ready for checkoff," Rand acknowledged.

"Psychobank activated?"

He directed a mental impulse

at the psychodynamic, converter. A loud, steady note welled from deep within his brain as the converter responded, signifying readiness to transpose future unspoken directives into control charges.

"Two degrees starboard," he thought. *"Increase speed five per cent."*

He felt the tug of centrifugal force and the pull of acceleration as the orders were carried out.

"Psychobank activated and functioning," he called into the radio pickup.

"M-drive power on?"

He engaged it with a thought; felt his skin tingle as the ship's field reached for resonance with the interstellar flux. As an added test, he ordered a burst of speed. He blacked out as the crushing force of acceleration smashed him against the bowl of the padded dock.

"Magnaflux drive on," he answered as he came to.

"Stasis field—"

Rand interrupted impatiently. "I checked it twice on the way out. Everything's shipshape."

"Then good luck. And watch out for the *lucies*."

"Lucies?"

"That's what Mac — McGough — called them . . . the hallucinations. You remember. He talked about seeing things when he got close to light speed."

"Mac was inherently superstitious." Rand laughed dryly. "Ever hear of an Irishman who wasn't? He even saw things when he was standing still."

He realized there was no more static in the receiver and his last observation had gone unheard. Drake had stopped transmitting.

Abruptly he was aware he could do it now! He could race with the ship — perhaps even using bursts of M-power—for the Colonist test satellite. That would free him of his toyed-with-mouse feeling in the Earthside project. But then, he would have failed his mission. The terms of his commission offered no respite. Even after light-plus speed was achieved, it would be his lot to remain in undercover work in order to trace possible further developments. And, if he tried to ignore his orders, the monitoring gland was there to whip him back into submission.

SIGHING hopelessly, he cut the normal drive jets and, with a grim sense of resignation, poured full power to the M-drive.

"Number Two—return to base immediately!" Captain Sanders' voice rasped in the receiver. "Jordan! Come back!"

The Titanic vise of vicious force flattened him against the curving surface of the dock.

Three Gs . . . Four . . . Six . . .

Adrenalin-like supersecretions raced through his body as he pondered the frantic message to return to Satellite City. Files grated over raw nerves and he tried to find some way to release the pained scream. But the outburst could only be restrained.

Had he slipped up? Had he forgotten to cover one of his moves? Was this the unmasking?

But it was too late to turn back now!

Eight Gs . . . Ten . . . Eleven . . . Twelve . . .

Unconsciousness snatched him from the maw of physical and mental agony.

An eternity later, he was conscious again. But it was an awareness that was devoid of physical sensations. It was as though his ego were a free entity.

He was safe now—safe from the hateful accelerative force that otherwise would have rendered his body first a horrible pulp, then, eventually, a thin film of viscous substance spread evenly over the aft bulkhead. He would remain secure, every minute particle of his body utterly immutable in the cabin's molecular stasis shield —every particle as capable of resisting contraction with acceleration as was the supermetal of the ship. And the stasis shield would lift only when the astronomical

number of Gs decreased to a quantity physiologically tolerable.

An hour later (he guessed it was that long) he cut in the psychovision circuit and looked into space around him.

Already his speed was tremendous! Already he was reaching out for the previously believed ultimate rate of motion! The stars on either side were shifting pinpoints of blazing light that seemed to slither in fantastic displays of relative motion among themselves—the farthest sweeping forward to outrace the nearest as their positions were displaced in the parallactic phenomenon.

Onward he streaked toward the chameleon stars ahead, fascinated as he watched their hues become more violet; away from the stars to his rear that seemed to blush increasingly deeper as he withdrew.

After an hour of incredulous observation, he relinquished his protracted vision to rest and wait. When he looked again, he started, recalling Drake's reference to Mac's hallucinations.

It wasn't a familiar celestial sphere that surrounded him now. And, even as he stared in amazement, faint stars, seemingly flickering from existence, disappeared! And new ones, surging in brilliancy like novae, sprang into being to take the places of the old.

CONFOUNDED, he realized he must be at the barrier! If he were not going through now, he soon would be . . . Or was he merely the victim of the hallucinations that had plagued Mac on his jousts with the fringe of light speed?

There was more of the impossible transpiring in the lonely, crazed universe outside. The constant displacement of the fading, familiar stars in the foreground against those in the background attested to his still-increasing speed. But the new stars—the ones that had sprung into existence from nowhere—contradicted the impression of terrific velocity. Their rate of parallactic displacement was decreasing! Their motion indicated a *slackening* of speed!

As he reached the threshold of light speed, the relative motion of the abortive stars became negligible. And the familiar stars—the remaining few which displayed frantic movement to confirm his unbelievable velocity—were fading rapidly.

Now they were gone!

Terrified, he withdrew his vision.

It was as though he had been existing in two universes at once, represented by the two groups of stars—one disappearing, the other appearing. A dichotomous reality that traced his emergence from the one plane and his entry into

the higher one.

Cautiously, he looked again . . . this time not outside the ship. Instead he focused his psychovision on the speed measuring instruments.

Less than one-tenth of one per cent below light speed!

He sent the instructive impulse to the psychodynamic converter, ordering no acceleration beyond barrier velocity.

Then he waited—perhaps another half hour.

Abruptly, physical sensation returned.

Automatic relays, activated by the absence of further acceleration, had lifted the stasis shield.

A tremor of apprehension raced through him. The stillness! The awful loneliness! Was it another hallucination—this weird sensation of motionlessness that belied the now physically visible speed gauge which indicated light speed?

Hesitantly, he squirmed against the padding of the pilot's dock and turned to look through the view port.

*It was bright sunlight outside!
He was not moving!*

A green blanket of grass stretched up a gentle slope to merge with trees and form a forest perhaps half a mile away! The brilliant sunlight danced in silvery reflections against a glittering water-

fall.

Stupefied, he unbuckled his harness and reeled to the port.

A girl in a single-piece, tight-fitting cloth waved and smiled up at him!

Numbly, he waved back.

Mac, he reminded himself—the lucies. He laughed. He probably hadn't even left the pilot's dock.

The girl beckoned.

He went over to the hatch . . . and opened it.

The air was cool and sweet—alive with the twittering of happy, hidden birds.

The girl stood directly below the hatch. "Weil-come," she said: "We wait you."

Then she withdrew her hand from behind her back and held up a garland of poignantly fragrant blossoms. She tried to put it around his neck, but it broke. He caught it before it fell to the ground.

"You stay thees time?" she asked, extending a hand to help him down.

He laughed stupidly.

"No be afraid," she begged.
"You be happy here."

She pointed off to one side.

NOW he was aware of the voices of children at play—voices in an unintelligible language. Others—adult men and women, all dressed primitively—came walking leis-

surely over a rise. They headed toward the ship, chatting and laughing and waving at him.

One of the children tossed a wad of clay-like substance, presumably being used as a ball, and it flew through the hatch, plastering itself against the rear bulkhead.

Damned realistic hallucinations! He swore and shook his head in dismay, backing into the ship.

"No go! No go!" the girl pleaded frantically.

He closed the hatch on the girl's voice and returned to the dock, strapping himself in.

If the gauge itself were no aberration in logical perception, he could assume he was still traveling along the barrier.

He glanced out the port again. The illusionary scene persisted. Only, now the girl and the others who had come toward the ship were backing away. The children had stopped their games to watch.

Rand shrugged indifferently at his deceptive imagination and sent the directive impulse for deceleration into the thought converter.

His body grew heavy with inertia. But before he blacked out, he sent through a delay order. Then he directed gyro-control to reverse the heading of the ship so that his loss of speed would be along the course of acceleration and he would reach normal drive speed almost at the point where he had

begun his barrier-crashing run.

Next he reinstated the former order and yielded to the physical lethargy of the stasis shield.

Hours later the port flange locked against the lip of the Test receiving dock at Satellite City. The illusions were gone now, but the redolence of the garland remained like an irrepressible memory.

The hatch swung open and Captain Sanders leaped in. Even before Rand could remember the other's frantic attempts to call back the flight, the Captain was racing through the cabin and toward the aftercompartment.

"Tried to stop you," he called over his shoulder. "I think we caught the agent."

Rand cast off his shoulder harness and raced after him.

"York found him aboard before you left," Sanders continued, wrenching at the hatch handle. "Caught him hiding back aft. But the spy mauled him; left him for dead in a gear locker. However, York'll be okay."

Sanders got the afterhatch open.

He gasped and closed the compartment immediately. But he had held the hatch ajar long enough for Rand to see the sludge that covered the bulkhead like a slimy emulsion—red and gray.

"Looks like inertia did a pretty good job on him." Sanders made

no attempt to hide his revulsion. "Guess he didn't know the stasis shield was limited . . . Have a crew scrape him off and clean up in here. Then come to the office and report."

They went back through the pilot's compartment.

The Captain stopped before the exit hatch. "What in hell smells like gardenias in here?"

His eyes searched the cabin, came to rest at a spot on the deck near the pilots' dock. Rand followed his gaze.

A garland of white blossoms lay on the cold metal.

THE Captain always wore flight boots. He was wearing them now and they thumped harshly against the aluminum floor of his office as he paced before the transparent bulkhead in the rim of Satellite City, occasionally glancing out at the celestial display.

"So you didn't reach the barrier?" he said annoyed.

"No, sir." Rand spread his hands helplessly. "I . . . " (What was it Mac had complained of?) ". . . sensed vibrations from the M-drive converter. I thought it would be better to have it checked over once more. The manual control panel retraction gear is stuck too. Had to come in on psycho." The latter was no lie.

If he admitted achieving light-

plus speed, he would have to tell about the hallucinations that were somehow real enough to leave concrete evidence of their existence. He didn't want to be placed in a position where he would have to explain without first learning 'why' and 'how' for himself.

"You should have gone ahead regardless," Sanders said adamantly.

"But maintenance never got the vibrations out of McGough's ship," Rand protested. "If they had, maybe Mac would still be with us."

The Captain turned and glowered. All the other bugs were removed, weren't they? It might have been one of those that caused the ship loss—not necessarily the vibrations. Next time ignore them."

He fished in his pocket; placed two small, shiny masses on the desk.

"See these before?"

They were quartz-like. Rand shook his head.

They were found in a clump of mud that was pressed against the bulkhead in your ship's control cabin. They are M-type rectifier crystals, uncut . . . I'm afraid this means the spy hunt will have to go on."

Rand frowned, waiting for him to continue and steeling himself against the onrush of inner pain which he knew would come should the Captain maneuver him into a

position of suspicion.

"Either the maintenance crew was careless when they installed the magnaflux drive," Sanders went on, "or someone was employing a unique method of secreting them aboard your ship until the unfortunate agent could commandeer it and take it back to their test satellite."

Enraged, he slammed his fist on the desk. "One M-crystal couldn't be bought with all the uranium in ten systems! Over a thousand asteroids have been pulverized since the original supply was found in one chunk of rock beyond Mars' orbit. Without those crystals, there could be no M-drive!"

He paused to catch his breath. "When the Colonists gained access to our supply, the men responsible were executed. I should think mere life in prison would be too lenient for the incompetency that would allow two of the last few to get out of our hands, wouldn't you? Especially when we don't have enough to run the converter of another single ship!"

Numbly, Rand nodded.

SANDERS stared intently at him. "Do you suppose, Lieutenant Jordan, that someone among us could have gotten them from supply and planted them aboard the ship for the agent? York said the man had no wad of mud

when they fought."

There was an incriminatory undertone in the Captain's voice and Rand braced himself against its effects—even as hateful, synthetic hormones raced through his system to wrack his entire body and prepare him for action, possibly destruction, by physio-chemical means. He fought the welling pain.

"I find the theory of a second spy hard to accept too," Sanders went on. "But we can't take chances, can we? For that reason I am going to test every member of our personnel."

He smiled proudly.

"How?" Rand asked, not unduly curious.

"There's a simple way. We have only to stage a little drama—confront each one with the hypothetical situation of his arrest."

Rand frowned, puzzled.

"To demonstrate," Sanders grasped his wrist and held it in a tight grip, "I walk up to you and say you're under arrest; you have been proven to be a Colonist agent."

Searing flame erupted at the base of Rand's brain, the seat of the synthetic gland, and lanced like lightning throughout his body. It wrought its excruciating effects, but not a muscle in his face twitched to give overt evidence of its existence.

"A normal person—he who is

a loyal Earthman—wouldn't be at all affected," the Captain went on. "But it will be different with the spy. Although he realizes it is only play-acting, the stimulus will have been provided to activate his psycho-impulse destructor. The results won't be apparent—for a while. For several minutes, he will continue to act normally—just as you are acting."

Rand swore inwardly against all the torturous sensations that pierced his body like sword-points as toxic solutions, released by the grafted gland, began unleashing their fatal effects on every organ.

"Despite his fortune," Sanders laughed, "he will not betray himself—not for a while. He will not fight. He will not run. He will continue to pretend to be innocent because the still logical part of his mind will argue that, since it is only play-acting, he may still convince us he is not the spy and may escape self-destruction."

The Captain maintained his tense grip on Rand's wrist and stared into his face. "But, when the time limit is up — when the toxins reach lethal strength — we will watch him lose his involuntary veneer of composure and writhe in torture. We will watch him die . . . or we will kill him first!"

The veneer of composure was wearing off now! Rand was vaguely aware of that as the pain mount-

ed to unbearable proportions. He opened his mouth to scream.

Sanders released him. "But," he shrugged, "perhaps we won't even have to stage the drama with more than five or ten men in this command before we scare the agent into the open—or cause him to try to run."

EXHAUSTED and almost dazed with an inner impassivity, Rand rode the public conveyer toward Officers' Quarters on the other side of the rim.

If only there were some escape! If only it were a simple matter of stealing the test ship and bringing it to the Colonists! But no. It was illogical that they'd want that. They had ships already, and enough crystals to run at least two of them. They were performing their own experiments with the barrier.

And their only requirement of him was that he remain indefinitely with the Earthmen. They had trained him for that since he had been a child; trained him as a *lifetime* agent. They had spent fortunes establishing his status as the missing son of an Iowa family—and additional fortunes seeing to it that his mind developed brilliantly and that he would be steered along the right channels into a select position.

There were others in his "corps"

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too—others whom he did not, could not know. And all were in equally hopeless positions . . . in effect, mental slaves shackled by the prospect of self-destruction if they were detected; of God-knows-what if they despaired of their lot and acted in any manner which they sensed would be detrimental to their duties.

If only there were some neutral spot to which he could flee. But even that was impossible! All was either Colonies or Earth. And the autacoidal modifier would not permit dereliction.

He sat erect suddenly. What would happen, he wondered, if he should announce to Earth authorities that he was a Colonist agent who wanted to change sides?

It was as though someone had run a rusty, jagged knife into his backbone and drawn it up the length of his spinal column, fraying every nerve that was in its way.

He hurled aside the thought immediately. The Colonist neuropsychologists had even considered the possibility of violation of allegiance and had arranged it so that merely considering betrayal would touch off the destructive process.

The pain subsided.

But there was something else! A low, whining "C" note that seemed to gain amplification in the

base of his brain even as he gave his attention to it.

Contact! A Colonist liaison agent was near!

The public conveyor swept toward the civilian housing area and the note welled—like a clear, sustained trumpet tone. The conveyor passed the public park area and the note began to diminish.

He got off and walked back to the park. The tone grew in volume. In the center of the area of fountain, flowers and shrubbery were two persons—a blonde girl in a black dress, her back turned to him as she bent to look at the fish in the pond, and an enlisted spaceman.

Stepping into the park, he started as the short-range counter beat damped the resonating psycho-wave and the note dropped off into silence. Either the girl or the spaceman was the bearer of the concealed psycho-oscillator!

He sat on the bench and waited.

Would it be she? What would she be like? He had not even seen a Colonist girl since he had been a child. Would she be demure and provincially unassuming and sweet and attractive—like all Colonist women must be? Would he be sorry for her because she was trapped in the same web of fatal intrigue that held him?

She turned. And her eyes flashed on him briefly. She was pretty.

Suddenly he was eager. Perhaps she had been on the Martian colony recently and would be able to tell him about his home planet. But his shoulders sagged. He was hoping too soon. It might be the spaceman who was the contact.

ABRUPTLY the enlisted man turned and left. As he stepped onto the avenue, Rand waited for the unheard note to resume—as he knew it would if the resonant psycho-wave's origin was withdrawn from the short-range, dampening area.

But the silence remained. It was the girl! He gave the barely perceptible signal of acknowledgement.

She came over and sat by him. "I am Paula," she said in a low voice. "I will receive your reports for the time being."

"Will you be here permanently?" He studied her face, wishing she would smile. "Where are you from?"

Her eyes deepened and she stared at him, as though they were unreasonable questions.

"I mean," he added hastily, "I thought you might be from New Chicago—on Mars."

"I was trained at Venusport. I was born there."

"Oh."

"Your flight—what were the results? Did you pierce the bar-

rier?"

He hesitated. "No."

Pain erupted in his head again. God! Wouldn't the damned psycho-inhibitor even allow him to tell a convenient lie?

"That is—I'm not sure," he corrected. The pain left. "The instruments showed light-plus speed. But there were hallucinations."

"Similar to the ones reported by that other pilot here?"

As far as he knew, Mac hadn't given any details of the hallucinations. "Yes, similar."

"You are to pay particular attention to the illusions. There's a possibility they may be important."

"Can't we get reports from the pilots of our own test ships?"

"We lost one . . . on the second test flight. He had reported hallucinations on the first. The second ship can't be tested. We're a few M-crystals short of having enough for the magnaflux rectifier-amplifier circuits. My main purpose here is to get more . . . all of them, if possible."

"They don't have enough left to drive another ship."

"Whatever they have will help out." Then she was silent.

"Have you ever been to New Chicago?" he asked.

"Once."

"What is it like? Has it changed? Did they—?"

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"You are concerning yourself with irrelevant considerations," she clipped. "You will do well to devote both your energies and speculations to your assignment."

Suddenly he was dejected. Her frigid disposition was as impenetrable as the light barrier. Surely she couldn't be representative of Colonists he had known! Or was it possible they had all changed—had become hardened, even as she was, as a result of war anxiety?

"Your work," Paula continued, "is too hazardous to allow even one moment for consideration of anything except precaution. You would do well to take example from Ralston's recent fate."

"Ralston?"

"The man who got—mangled on your ship."

"You know about him? What was he doing there?"

"Checking on you, of course."

"On me?"

"Naturally. Whenever there is an opportunity, agents are cross-checked for loyalty in the event that their psycho-physiological modifiers are functioning below minimum compulsion strength . . . At any rate, Ralston slipped up in failing to know that the stasis shield did not include the aftercompartment."

He studied her caustically, silently.

THE severity which was now adequately hiding the beauty in her face was unchanged. "You seem not to approve of our methods." She flashed a brief, nebulous smile. "All is not as treacherous as it might seem . . . considering that we are out to crush every Earthman we can find on the home planet and their Lunar Loylists."

The impersonal iciness of her eyes was swept away before a flood of vivid, burning hate. She clenched her fists. "Not a single Colonist will be satisfied until the Earth-Lunar system is reduced to asteroidal rubble!"

"Is that the way all the Colonists feel?" He hid the bitterness in the question.

"You will be reassured to know those are the sentiments of all. But everyone realizes that without the weapon of plus-light speed, we must abandon our plans to gain dominance in the System. That is why our jobs are so important—yours, to see that we keep ahead of the enemy in developments so they can't achieve success and strike first, and mine, to get their supply of rectifier crystals."

It wasn't true, he told himself. The Colonists *couldn't* be as vehement in their hatred for Earth as Earthmen were for the Colonists. Their fight against the almost insurmountable odds of alien nature

had taught them to live peacefully, not only among themselves but with others on other worlds.

His great-grandfather had been among the scores of prepioneers who had introduced and accelerated the growth of nitrogen-fixing bacteria to prepare the Martian soil for vegetation. There had been a great-uncle who had lost his life in the job of awakening thousands of slumbering volcanoes so they could release their billows of carbon dioxide to support plant life.

And his grandfather had been a member of the Martian Forestry Corps that had carried out the Herculean task of planting the giant, mutated oxygen-giving trees. At the same time, another relative had helped engineer the first great Marsport.

All of them—everyone back through the five generations of Martian conquest—had been too busy welding victory over natural forces to be caught in a hateful web of nationalism and planetarism. They had broken from Mother Earth, of course. But the separation had been a matter of economic expediency.

Paula looked over her shoulder, then turned to him suddenly and pulled him close, pressing her lips against his.

Besides being startling, the kiss was cold, limp. She broke it a moment. "Put your arms around me,

—quick!"

As he obeyed, with his lips touching hers, he saw the elderly man standing hesitatingly, embarrassedly, at the entrance to the park. After a moment, he turned and went away.

She pushed herself from him. "People don't ordinarily intrude on lovers . . . Now, tell me about the hallucinations."

But before he could speak, the conveyor pulled up at the park's entrance and several young couples got out, carrying lunch baskets.

Her lips were taut with disappointment. "It'll have to wait until later," she whispered, rising and leaving.

As she turned down the avenue, the mental tone vibrated through his brain sharply. It was steady for several seconds. Then it decreased until it disappeared.

RAND sat thoughtfully on the veranda outside the sprawling home of Captain Sanders. It was night in Satellite City. The filtered rays of a small sun, tracing its solar prominences against a black, velvety background, no longer shown through the great transparent dome.

Instead, a huge Lunar orb, magnified tenfold by proximity, hung like a friendly Colossus in the star-speckled sky, seemingly at arm's reach beyond the curving plasto-

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glass.

He ground one cigarette into the thin covering of garden soil with the toe of his shoe and lighted another. There would be a test hop in the morning, he reflected, and he would then have the opportunity to learn more about McGough's 'lucies,' about the phantoms that could leave a wreath of flowers in his ship—a ball of mud encrusted with the fantastically rare magna-flux crystals.

"Join me in a drink while you're waiting for Carol?"

The Captain stood relaxed in the doorway, his satin dressing gown wrapped tightly about him much like a regal robe.

Rand followed him in and watched while he mixed.

"We've tested half the maintenance crew," Sanders said, stirring the drinks, "and still we haven't succeeded in flushing out any hidden agents."

He handed one of the glasses to Rand. "Do you suppose we might be guilty of a false premise?"

Rand stared questioningly at him.

"We're working from the bottom up," the Captain explained. "We're granting officers temporary immunity from suspicion. I believe I'm ready to amend my thoughts on this matter. It's apparent that a spy would necessarily have to be in a position of

prominence. Therefore, it seems to me we should be working from the top—from Commander Clarkson on down."

His eyes were burning intently into Rand's. Were they afire with suspicion—concealed menace? Was it that Sanders knew he was the guilty one—knew it, but was waiting until a time when confederates could be exposed?

"We'll start with the brass tomorrow morning." Sanders toyed with his glass. "Clarkson; Commander Farrell; Commander Jones . . ."

Rand kept his voice casual. "Does that cancel the test run?"

"Of course not. We'll get around to the officers directly concerned with Operation Light Barrier after the flight is completed."

"I understood spacemen were noted for not talking shop during off hours."

It was Carol. She stood on the stairs, smiling at them.

Rand helped her down as Sanders placed his drink on the table. Then the Captain kissed her on the cheek and started upstairs.

Was the fatherly kiss genuine, Rand wondered, or was it as it seemed to be—a gesture that had perhaps been rehearsed for such an occasion as this?

She went out on the veranda and he followed.

"So father's going to perform a

loyalty test on everybody in the project?" Her somber face, turned toward the Lunar giant, was striking in its pallidness.

HE nodded and feinted orally, "Everybody. He's come up with a foolproof trap this time. I don't see how our Colonist friend will wiggle out of this one."

She turned and touched his hand. "Rand . . ."

Her lips worked indecisively, but no words came out.

"What is it, Carol?"

"I hope he escapes, Rand! I hope he finds some way to get out of Satellite City and never comes back!"

He seized the muscles of his face in a firm grip of resolution, refusing to let them portray the cautious, confused emotions. And he steeled himself to ignore the insidious pains of the stimulus-toxins that were even now being released.

"How can you say anything like that, Carol? How . . ."

"It's the way I feel. I don't want to see anyone suffer. If I could, I think I would *help* him get away!"

He cursed the treachery—the abominable subterfuge she was employing to gain his confidence and wring from him the admission. And the alarm signals of inner pain mounted.

"You don't know what you're saying, Carol!" He injected a desperate plea in his tone. "Can't you understand that if it suited his purpose he wouldn't hesitate to blow up Satellite City? Kill every one of us?"

She lowered her eyes guiltily—or was it in frustration?

He had eluded the trap! Inwardly, he sighed as his nerves slipped off the razor-edge of vigilance.

She looked up abruptly. (A new attack?) "But somewhere, Rand, there may be a girl who loves him . . . one who desperately wants to see him relieved of his dangerous assignment—one who will die of loneliness if he is captured and killed."

She was going to continue her cruel, relentless thrusts, working on him with daggers of plaintive sympathy: And all the while it was even possible there were Security agents hidden in the shrubs, ready to pounce out at the moment that he weakened.

With a sense of savage desperation, he seized her and drew her to him, pressing his lips roughly against hers. He had caught her off guard! She stiffened in surprise, then protest, for a moment.

Then her hands were on his shoulders and she was returning the kiss avidly. How unlike the Colonist woman agent she was!

Yet, the only difference between

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the two girls was that they were carrying out their assignments in diverse manners—procedures dictated by the circumstances. And it was his bitter lot to have fallen in love with the deadliest, most deceitful one!

He released her and strode out toward the avenue. Behind him came the soft murmur of a restrained sob . . . or was it a sigh of disappointment?

FROM the depths of his physical stasis Rand used the psychovision circuit to keep his attention directed at the velocity meter. A secondary line of protracted sight was aimed through the view port.

Would he solve the mystery of McGough's hallucinations? Would he learn the casual relationship between the mirage and the materialization of a wreath of flowers and a crystal-encrusted ball of clay—and the overall connection of the entire manifestation with ultimate speed?

Ninety-eight-point-seven, the gauge indicated.

What would he do after the flight? Return to Satellite City and trust to phenomenal luck to help him avoid detection?

Ninety-nine-point-one.

The familiar stars outside shone only with the faintest glimmer. The new ones—the ones which had crept into being only an hour

ago and had gained magnitude steadily—glistened with pretentious majesty.

Ninety-nine-point-eight.

There were no traces of the former stars now! Only the new ones dominated space!

But there was something else! The blackness of space was bowing before a faint light that brightened as he concentrated on it—a suffused light that was even now stronger than all except the first magnitude of stars.

And shimmering forms were taking shape! There was the vague outline of a hill, cotton-like cumulus clouds, a scintillating waterfall!

The velocity indicator touched one hundred per cent.

No ghostliness to the forms and shapes outside now! The hallucination was complete. Again the girl in the primitive dress stood waving to him.

But he ignored her, kept his attention on the velocity meter. Why wouldn't it rise higher? Why wouldn't the M-drive accelerate him to a speed in excess of that of light?

Abruptly he was aware that the stasis shield no longer enfolded the cabin. It was regulated to drop automatically, he remembered, when his G-load had decreased to bearable proportions. Then he must actually be in a state of zero acceleration!

It was no illusion! He was sure of that now. The reality of all that had happened—of all that existed outside the ship—was utterly undeniable, even if it hadn't already been verified by the garland and the wad of mud.

The mud, he recalled suddenly, had contained M-type crystals! Did that mean he would find more of the invaluable objects here?

Eagerly, he freed himself from the pilot's dock and raced to the hatch. If this were reality—if he could discover an unlimited supply of the material necessary for superspeed—he would earn for the Colonists an unsurpassable advantage!

He threw the hatch open.

The smiling girl was still waving.

McGough stood beside her!

Of his uniform; only the trousers, reduced to tattered shorts, remained. The muscles of his huge chest rippled as he signaled with his arm. Like the girl, he was barefoot.

"Come on down and join the gang," he urged, laughing and throwing his cap back at a rakish angle. "You're lucky. You got here just in time."

STUNNED, Rand descended and stood wavering before the big Irishman. He summoned questions, but in his amazement he

could find no words.

Mac laughed at his uncertainty; he turned to drive away the primitive people who were converging on them. But the Irishman possessively held on to the arm of the smiling girl.

To Rand, the fragrance of the blossoms that adorned her flaming hair seemed to be the only reality. "Sorry I wasn't here the first time you came through," Mac said apologetically but grinning.

"Through?" Rand repeated.

Mac took his arm and led him and the girl across a rise and into a glen. "Through the barrier . . . Guess it looks pretty unreal to you. Like it did to me when I first broke it."

"It is, isn't it?" Rand asked hesitatingly.

Mac stopped in front of a thatched hut, completely in the shade of a large tree. He dropped to the soft matting of grass in front of the dwelling, pulling the girl down with him.

Laughing, he pinched her arm. She gasped, smiled and laughed with him, apparently realizing she was the principal in a friendly joke.

"It passes the pinch test," Mac observed. "So there must be some solidity to it all." He indicated the trees, the ground, the girl.

"But—but . . ." Rand stammered.

"Oh," Mac interrupted. "Par-

don the oversight . . . Rand, this is Urella; Urella, Rand."

"You stay thees time?" the red-haired girl asked eagerly.

Rand dropped to the ground. "But how—?"

"Hell, Man!" Mac slapped him on the back. "There are a million adages that ought to make you want to dispense with the questions: Don't look a gift horse; make hay while the sun shines; eat, drink and—"

"Where are we, Mac?" Rand demanded. "How did we get here? Why is it that—?"

Mac brushed aside the questions with a burst of laughter. "That's not important, Rand boy." He put his arms around Urella and winked at her. "What counts is that we are here. What more can one ask? You're going to stay, of course?"

His characteristic cheerfulness—his pretentious emphasis on the few years' age difference between him and Rand to create the impression that he was fatherly old—lent more reality to the scene and Rand felt his composure returning. "Stay—but where?"

"Why, in paradise, of course! If it ain't paradise, I'll settle for it and let you have all the heavens you can find in that—that other universe."

He kissed Urella on the cheek and she lowered her face dotingly against his shoulder.

Rand rose impatiently. "Dammit man! I crash through the barrier and find myself not streaking through the void, but standing still on the surface of a planet! How?"

Mac lay back, plucked a blade of grass, and bit through the juicy stem several times.

"That's always been your trouble, Rand boy. You're too much of a realist; you have to have an explanation for everything. Now take me . . . I don't give a damned *how*; I'm just satisfied *that*. Of course, it took me three trips to realize it."

"Do you know where we are?"

"Another universe, perhaps." Mac turned lazily so he could face Urella, who now lay beside him. "What do you think of her, Rand? I'm a pretty good English teacher, huh?"

He touched a finger playfully to her nose and she smiled, moved closer.

"Another universe!" Rand dropped to the grass again; sat on several lumps of hard matter. He investigated and saw they were M-type crystals!

"I was afraid you'd find them," Mac said, annoyed, "and decide to take a shipload back."

Rand picked up six of the quartz-like pebbles and stuffed them in his blouse pocket.

"YOU'RE not going to take them back," Mac said flatly, propping himself on an elbow. "It took me three trips to decide to stay. I'm counting on you deciding on your second visit that New Eden shouldn't be discovered and exploited!"

Although there was no threat in the tall Irishman's voice, there was an intense firmness. He glanced into the nearby clearing where scores of adults were happily engaged in lively games. "Listen to them. Like children. They don't even know what 'fight' means."

"You said something about another universe," Rand reminded.

Mac lay back again. "That's the way I figure it . . . Look at it this way, Rand: Ultimate speed down there could be zero speed up here—or perhaps one notch above zero speed."

"Don't get it," Rand quipped.

"I don't either," Mac sighed. "So why bother?"

"Go on."

"Okay. Why couldn't it be like that—a continuum, four dimensions of course, with light as the flux that holds the planes together?"

He found a fresh piece of grass to chew. "Light, like a thread, running from plane to plane, interweaving as it carries impulses from object to subject in any one

plane, yet remaining invisible to the other coexisting planes through which it travels.

"After all, only light, of all the things that exist, represents a complete welding together of space and time . . . light, by which space is measured in units of time and by which time is measured in units of space."

He rolled over and touched Urella's small, pointed nose again. "You understand what it's all about, honey?"

She giggled; shook her head. "It make no—sense."

Mac laughed. "Doesn't to me or him either." He turned back to Rand, waving his arm in a burlesque dramatic gesture. "Light, weaving from object to subject, but barely remaining below the threshold of detection in the infinitude of progressive planes or universes. Light, at the same time the separation between planes in the continuum —like spreads of cheese between slices of bread in a multiple deck sandwich . . . "

"Hungry, Mac." The girl tugged at his shoulder.

"Me too, sweetheart. Perhaps our guest is too." He turned to Rand. "The fare is excellent. We can offer . . . "

"I'll take another serving of light," Rand said seriously. "Why won't the M-drive give us speed in excess of light?"

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"It does, Rand-boy! One notch above it. Why can't we go faster? I don't know. Maybe there's another set of crystals that accommodates frequencies necessary to climb the speed ladder between this plane and the next higher one."

Rand was irritably silent.

"Hell," Mac blurted. "I don't know what I'm talking about! It's all mixed up in a weird, incomprehensible relationship — space and time and light and darkness and speed and motionlessness and subject and object. You're the guy who wants to separate them. Go ahead."

"All right, Mac," Rand conceded. "Granted. This world is in a plane adjacent to our universe—a world which we reached by transcending the speed of light. Question: Why is it that we always end up here—no matter which direction we head out in on the light-barrier run?"

"It's your question. You answer it . . . Maybe it has something to do with subjective and objective; here and there. Hell, we can't know the answers. We're neither scientists nor philosophers. And this is an uninvestigated field. It's like asking a monkey to explain why he should end up at the north pole no matter which direction he takes away from the south pole."

"Okay," Rand persisted. "Let's

say the two Systems are now in a fixed position relative to each other. Why don't they move out of hyperconjunction?"

"You got me, pal. Maybe it's that since motion in either universe is relative, the two Systems are motionless with respect to each other, while both their universes whirl gaily about them."

"Why don't we break through in space, instead of on the surface of a planet—and invariably in this same spot?"

MAC shrugged, grinned. "Now I'll ask one: Why does gravity reach out and pull objects with a force miraculously equal to their inertial resistance, so that a feather and a ten-ton meteor will fall at the same speed?"

Rand frowned in annoyance.

Mac laughed amusedly. "I'll give you what might be a hint on why we always end up here: A quantum of action in the form of light waves is emitted by an atom. These happy little probable particles go spreading through the universe until they strike a confused atom which can only receive a quantum of action."

"Then, all the carefree little waves, dispersed all over the universe, vanish instantaneously into the absorbing atom . . . Something like a thousand monkeys leaving the south pole on divergent courses

and winding up at the north pole at the same time, isn't it? Does it make sense to you?"

Rand shook his head.

Mac laughed. "Doesn't to me either. Let's just say there's a casual relationship between humans down there and humans up here. . . . Say! Maybe we got something! Maybe there *was* a former civilization that spread from there to here, or from here to there. The latter, most probably. That might explain why M-crystals are practically non-existent down there and as plentiful as pebbles up here."

"Where's Test Ship Number One?"

"Rusted. Rusted and gutted. That's how I made sure I wouldn't be tempted to go back."

Rand rose; he turned to leave.

Mac sat up and laughed. "You're not going back either, Rand boy."

Rand clenched his fists. Super-adrenalin raced through his system from the implanted gland. He stared at the other pilot. Ordinarily, their mutual esteem would preclude any physical violence. But it was different now. Mac was interfering with what might be vital to the cause of the Colonists. And Rand had no control over the countermeasures to which the synthetic hormones would force him.

"Use your head, Rand," Mac

pleaded. "This place is different! It's not like Earth and the Colonies. If you take the crystals back and let Earth subjugate the Colonists, in twenty or thirty years there will be two other factions. The only thing that will be different is New Eden. They'll be swarming all over the place, teaching Urella and her people how to pilot ships and fight one another!"

LIEUTENANT Rand strode off, his fists almost clenched.

"There's one other thing you should know," Mac called after him. "The Number One isn't the only ship in New Eden . . . There's another Number One. Belongs to the Colonists. But it's gutted too."

Rand stopped, turned and stared puzzledly at the other pilot.

"Sure," Mac continued. "Jackson, the Colonist pilot, was here first. He's the one who convinced me I ought to stay. He knows too that Earthside had only enough crystals left to equip the converters of your ship; that if you stay here, there'll be no chance of any other ships coming through the barrier."

Apprehensively, Rand spun around and raced for Number Two.

Mac's laughter rose. "Too late, Rand boy. There're three disabled ships on New Eden now."

He dropped back down by the girl's side and kissed her.

Rand covered the rolling ground in great strides and leaped through the hatch, bypassing the inclined ladder.

He took the man by surprise. The tall, lean pilot in tattered clothes was using a brace bar which he had stripped from the pilot's dock as a wedge, trying to pry open the faulty, retracted manual control panel.

Whirling in the last second, he had no time to raise his arms against the synthetically stimulated fury. A lightning-fast fist found his face and he staggered, dropping the bar.

Goaded to superspeed by the only half-natural endocrinal secretions, Rand followed through within a fraction of a second with another blow that sent the man reeling backward and out of the hatch.

Even as he slammed the port shut, he saw Mac racing for the ship. Securing the hatch, he stood rigid for a moment, repeating to himself over and over that the crisis was past; that nothing was occurring detrimental to the strategy of the Colonists. Only through calm conviction could he quell the autacoidal fire within.

Vaguely, he considered filling the ship with crystals and returning to the Colonist test satellite.

But his orders were that he clear any voluntary impulsive action with a liaison agent first. And epithelial coercion would see that he followed the directive. So there was no course but to return to Satellite City and have Paula authorize the plan.

In his forced composure, psycho-impulses signifying that the danger had passed got through to the grafted gland and the flames that were coursing through his body were extinguished.

He was lucky! None of the vital parts of the ship had been sabotaged. All of them—even the M-drive destructor switch—were secure behind the panel which the traitorous Colonist pilot had been unable to pry open.

STIPPING through the Test port at Satellite City, he tensed. The strong, clear "C" note was sounding alarmingly in the base of his brain.

Paula! She was near. She was waiting.

"How'd it go?" the guard at the hatch began. "Did you—?"

But Rand brushed him aside and strode briskly down the corridor leading outside the Test area.

"Lieutenant!" the spaceman called after him. "Captain Sanders said you were to report immediately for the test to—"

But Rand had already reached the end of the corridor. He returned the salute of the second guard who stood at the double metal doors and stepped out.

The "C" note was louder.

He turned right, walking parallel with the group of short, stout Test buildings whose roofs were flush with the down-curving edge of the huge transparent dome. When the decrescendo of the tone became perceptible he turned and retraced his steps.

What would she want? Why was she exposing herself to the danger inherent in coming anywhere near the military section of the City.

He was past the building now—in an area where dense shrubbery and small trees decoratively hid the junction of surface and curving dome at the rim of the disc-like Satellite.

The note reached a climax . . . and dropped off abruptly into silence.

"In here," Paula's voice was a whisper from the shrubs.

He checked to see if he was being observed, brushed aside branches and entered.

She was searching the contents of her large, black purse.

"Roll up your sleeve," she ordered. "Quick!"

He carried out her instruction, but before he could question her,

she withdrew a hypodermic.

"I heard about Sanders' inquisition," she explained, holding his arm in a tight grasp and plunging the needle in. "This will counteract the epithelial secretions long enough for you to get by the psycho-test."

The liquid coursed through his veins and she withdrew the instrument. "Now you'd better get back before your absence becomes obvious. We'll talk about the flight later."

"Crystals, Paula!" he said excitedly. "I've got crystals! I know where there are thousands!"

He reached into his pocket and handed her the six.

"Where?" She studied them.

"It's hard to explain. The hallucinations aren't hallucinations at all. I broke through the light barrier! Through some impossible law of cosmic mechanics, you wind up at a—another world. The place is cluttered with these things!"

SHE was silent. Whether it was a result of surprise or concern he couldn't tell.

"I want an okay to return and load up with them," he continued. "Then I'll take Number Two back to the Colonist Satellite and—"

"I won't approve it," she said flatly. "Not until I clear it through. You're supposed to stay

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here. If there is a place to get an unlimited supply of crystals, you are our insurance to see that the Earthmen don't tap it too."

"But—"

"That's final. I'm only following orders. I'll tell them of your suggestion, however, when I make contact. If they approve, I won't say anything against it. But I can see that the more logical plan is to use these crystals to complete the circuits of our second test ship and send it out to load up with more—all the while keeping you here in your present capacity."

"But," he protested, "it might not work! The first Colonist test ship didn't get lost. The pilot deserted!"

He told her about Jackson and McGough.

"Don't you see?" he concluded. "Pilots aren't under synthetic compulsion! Sending one of them after the crystals is hazardous—they might not come back. If I go, I'll have to come back. That damned thing under my skull would kill me for even thinking about deserting!"

She was pensively quiet a moment. Then, "We'll still let a higher authority decide. Now get back and take your test. I'll be waiting for a complete report on this—other world business."

Rand made no attempt to conceal the frustration. Returning

with a shipload of crystals would have been an escape—a means of finding relief from his rôle as an agent, of having the organ of hell removed from his brain. For, once he returned to the Colonists, they couldn't take the chance of sending him back to Satellite City.

But now there was no hope of relief. The synthetic hormones would lash out in a fury throughout his system if it received even the hint of a mental impulse that he was contemplating acting contrary to orders.

But would it? Would it lash out at him *now*—with the injection in him?

Suddenly he laughed at Paula. "I'm going back," he announced. "I'm free now—free from that damned thing up here." He tapped the back of his head. "I can do anything I want."

There was neither resentment nor surprise in her cold stare. "You'll find," she said slowly, "that the injection will become impotent long before you can carry out your plan. It's good for about an hour."

She shrugged complacently, mockingly, and disappeared in the shrubbery.

The hell with her! he thought. He'd take the chance! Didn't the ship's stasis shield halt all physiological processes? The hours

in transit couldn't be counted against the one-hour reprieve offered by the injection. He could dedicate the brief period of grace wholly to getting to the ship, collecting the crystals and explaining to the Colonists his appearance at their satellite. He'd arm himself now and return to . . .

THERE was a slight movement in the bushes to his left—in the opposite direction from which Paula had gone. He stiffened, waiting for release of autacoids that would sharpen his every reflex for defensive action.

But they didn't come. Instead, his entire system remained almost completely balanced—tensed only to the degree which he imagined would be expected in a normal person. The injection, he remembered abruptly, had robbed him of that sole beneficial effect of the gland!

Forcing back hesitancy, he plunged into the bush, his arms outstretched.

A red-haired girl screamed, turned to run.

It was Carol!

He caught her by the shoulder, spun her around.

For perhaps a minute they stared into each other's eyes.

"You found out," he said finally.

Her face was a mask of rigidity. She nodded numbly.

"You knew all along?"

"I suspected. I saw you talking once to the librarian who was captured."

"But you wanted to make sure first?" His voice rose in anger. "You wanted to go about it cautiously so you could trap others at the same time."

Still her features were devoid of emotion.

"I knew," she said dazedly. "I knew you couldn't hate the Colonists as much as you pretended. You weren't that type."

She smiled enigmatically.

He studied her expression. It could reflect other emotions, but he saw only derision in the gesture.

Why did it have to be her? It could have been anyone else on Satellite City, on Earth—or anywhere in the System, for that matter. But it had to be Carol!

Bitterly, he clenched his fists. He had no choice. He had to kill her. But suddenly he fought a pang of remorse that forced him to ask why this couldn't have happened while he was under the effects of the synthetic modifier. Then, he would have felt less guilty.

"Rand," she began, "I—"

He lashed out with his fist.

She crumpled at his feet.

Then he knelt beside her and

extended his hands for her throat.

If he didn't kill her, she would expose him and Paula. It would make no difference as far as he was concerned. He would be gone back to the Colonists. But Paula . . .

His trembling fingers found her throat.

But was Paula his responsibility? Certainly she was no one worth saving! Even without a synthetic gland, she would be infinitely more vehement in her hatred for Earthmen than he was. And her exposure would not hurt the Colonists' cause—not if he brought them a ship filled with crystals.

Without even realizing that he had arrived at the decision not to kill Carol, he was on his feet and was racing back into the Test building.

In the ready room, he dug frantically through his gear locker and located the service revolver. Checking to see that it was loaded, he thrust it under his shirt and wedged it beneath his belt.

"Lieutenant Jordan! Lieutenant Jordan!" rasped the speaker on the wall. It was the voice of the Captain's orderly.

Ignoring the summons, he raced out the room and constrained his eagerness as he slowed to a walk approaching the hatch that led into Test Ship Two.

NUMBER Two steadily gained speed as the old, familiar stars faded and the new ones sprang into existence from nothingness to take their place. When the celestial metamorphosis was complete, the ship was for the third time uncannily resting in the usual spot on the surface of the phantom planet.

Leaving the pilot's dock, he withdrew the revolver from beneath his shirt and thrust its barrel under his belt, tuning the psycho-control gear to maximum receptive power at the same time.

He tested resonance, concentrating on an impulse that directed the opening of the exit port.

The hatch swung out swiftly, smoothly . . . Now it was possible to control the lock remotely—from outside. And there would be no danger of Mac or Jackson entering while he was gone.

But as he stood in the hatch, he saw he would not have to leave the vicinity of the craft to get all the crystals he needed. It was late afternoon and a sun low on the horizon lighted a myriad pinpoints of brilliancy on the ground all around him. Without moving more than a hundred feet from the ship he would be able to fill his pockets with enough M-crystals to drive a dozen Colonist ships!

He descended.

For the first time Urella was

not there to greet him. No one was in sight. It was uncomfortably still. Was it that they had expected him; had they been warned by Mac and Jackson to remain away from the site of materialization? He glanced suspiciously at the nearby forest.

"Back for the crystals?"

Jackson came around the bow of the ship!

"You can have all you want . . ." Mac, a service revolver gripped in his hand, stepped into view from astern. ". . . as long as you stay here with them."

Rand's first impulse was to direct the closing of the hatch. But it wasn't an urgent necessity. So, instead, he studied Mac's approach, watching for an opportunity to draw his gun..

"I wouldn't try it," Mac warned, standing in front of him now. "You've been a helluva good friend for a year. But I think I'm going to value the friendship of these people," he nodded back toward the forest, "more. I'm going to marry one of them, you see—all legal like . . . as legal as their rites can make it, at least."

Even with the gun in his hand, Mac's grin did not fade. Jackson walked up to join him.

Rand cursed himself under his breath. For years he had been a victim of the tortures that were a necessary adjunct of the involun-

tary ability to increase the speed of his reflexes tenfold when in danger. But now, the first time that he desperately needed the ability—to whip out his gun and fire before Mac's relatively slow reflexes could squeeze the trigger—it had been robbed from him by an injection.

"Sit down," Mac said informally. "We'll talk a while. I've still got great faith in you, Rand boy. Maybe when we get through, you'll even be willing to help us wreck your ship."

He reached out and took Rand's revolver.

SUDDENLY Rand was gripped with despair. Of all the Earthmen he had known, with the exception of Carol, he had felt the most affection and companionship for the big Irishman. But now, if he did not trick him before the effectiveness of the injection wore off, he would probably have to kill him to gain his release.

"Time being equivalent between the Earth-Colonist System and New Eden," Mac began, arranging himself comfortably on the ground but with the revolver still pointed at Rand, "our friend, Jackson here, was able to compute a certain momentous date and time . . . Tell him about it, Jackson."

The Colonist pilot glanced at his watch. "In about four hours, the

Colonist fleet is going to attack Earth, all the Lunar domes and Satellite City—all at the same time."

Rand was silent for several seconds. Then he gasped. "It isn't true! The Colonists wouldn't attack first! They're only preparing to defend themselves against an attack by—"

He cut himself off, alarmed. Had he said enough to lead them to suspect he was a Colonist agent?

Mac and Jackson looked askance at each other.

"The Colonists," Jackson went on, "have been even more eager to attack than Earth has. Sure, they like their planets and their cities. But they like Earth better—as a subjugated state."

He shrugged. "As a matter of fact, they're just a little bit more insidious than Earth. The attack plan proves that."

"But they can't start a war now!" Rand protested. "They have nothing to gain! The power is too evenly balanced."

"*Was*," Jackson corrected, "until they decided to abandon their light barrier tests. You see, a helluvá lot of M-crystals arranged in a series circuit will drive one ship up to the speed of light. One crystal will increase the speed of a single ship considerably, though."

"We had enough crystals for the magnaflux rectifier-amplifier cir-

cuit of one ship—almost enough for another. One of them is here—mine. The crystals for the other are now in the rectifier circuits of the Colonist fleet. The speed they will provide gives the Colonials enough confidence to go ahead with the attack."

It wasn't true! It couldn't be! The Colonists' principles and objectives were just, their cause, reasonable.

"So you see," Mac offered, "all the known crystals in the System are now dispersed to such an extent that, after a sufficient number of Colonial ships are knocked out of space, they will never be able to regather as many as they need to send another craft through the barrier."

"So," Jackson took up the rapidly unfolding argument, "from all indications, centuries will pass before man is again ready to scour the asteroid belt for more M-type rocks and attempt to crack the barrier."

Mac's revolver was drooping toward the ground, his arm hanging limply over his knee. Now was his chance! Now Rand might possibly seize the weapon from him! But, instead, he waited.

"You see, Rand boy," Mac said, shaking his head sullenly, "humans had to learn first that national warfare didn't pay off. That took

decades.

"This war won't be all bad. It will teach them how to live together on separate worlds. By the time they recuperate sufficiently to bother about the light barrier again—if they're fortunate enough to get the necessary crystals—their coming here won't be a curse to New Eden."

Mac looked at Jackson. "Earthmen are rotten."

Jackson nodded. "Colonists are stinkers."

"Not like Earthmen," Mac amended.

They both shook their heads regretfully.

MAC rose. "Okay, Rand boy. Ready to help us smash up Number Two?"

Rand lunged up, faced the other pilot. "You can't do it, Jackson! You can't stay here! These crystals! You've got to help get them back! You were here first. They *belong* to the Colonists!"

"Colonists!" Mac and Jackson exclaimed simultaneously.

Rand seized Jackson's arms. "I'm not an Earthman!" he exclaimed. "I'm a Colonist, like you!"

"An agent!" Jackson shouted comprehendingly.

Eagerly, Rand nodded. "They'll need the crystals! It'll give them the superiority—"

Mac grabbed his shoulder and spun him around. Then the Irishman's fist exploded in his face.

When he regained consciousness, Mac was bending over him.

"Damned spy!" he muttered.

It was the first time he had seen hate on the cordial pilot's face.

Jackson stood over them, looking down stiffly. "Ain't his fault, Mac. I've heard about them. They call them syntho-thought agents."

Mac frowned in puzzlement.

"They got contraptions—some kind of artificial glands—in their brains," Jackson continued. "Whenever they think wrong or try to act wrong with conscious intent, the damned things shoot out poison that makes them do only what they know will be okay by the Colonists. If they get captured by the enemy, it kills them."

"Psycho-impulse destructors!"

Jackson nodded.

"That right, Rand . . . boy?" Mac asked.

"Hell," Jackson spat on the ground. "He can't answer you without lying. Even if he wanted to—which he wouldn't in the first place, because the glands won't allow it—he couldn't help acting as cunning as possible to stick a knife in your back, if he had to."

Mac rose.

"Get back from him," Jackson cautioned. "Those damned glands

make him fast as hell. They step up his reflexes, or something. He could snatch that gun out of your hand and put a slug through both of us before you could blink your eye . . . I thought he moved too damned fast when he hit me in his ship."

Mac backed away, staring at Rand. There was no longer hate in his features. But the characteristic grin wasn't there either—only sympathy. "Probably been that way a couple of years, huh?"

"Couple of years hell!" Jackson laughed. "They take them when they're kids and train them all the way up . . . How long you had that thing in you, Jordan?"

"I think I was eight." Rand sat up and shook his head, then clamped his hands over his face.

He heard Mac swear. "Dammit! Why did it have to be him? I thought he was the best guy I'd ever run across. And there's Carol, too—the Captain's daughter. You wouldn't know about her. She's crazy over him. I can remember five, six years ago—she was hardly more than a kid then, and I was on a tour of duty under Captain Sanders at Lunar Dome Five—she used to tell me the kind of guy she'd like to fall . . ."

Rand glanced up sharply. "You knew her? She is the Captain's daughter?"

"Is there any reason why she

shouldn't be?" Mac asked.

"But—but she's an Earth agent—isn't she?"

"Agent?" Mac laughed sarcastically. "Why, I've known her since—"

"The syntho-thinkers," Jackson interposed, "suspect everybody."

"Oh, God!" Rand moaned. "I was wrong."

"You've been wrong about a helluva lot of stuff, Rand boy. But, like Jackson says, you couldn't help it. The poison wouldn't let the *right* thoughts get in your mind."

HE had been wrong—about a lot of things, like Mac said. Only, he never had the freedom even to suggest that to himself. But now, with the hateful synthetic compulsion system deadened, he was beginning to see true values for the first time. It was slow, slow and new. It had to be . . . for a whole lifetime he had been forced to think the exact opposite.

"The attack!" he exclaimed suddenly. "There will be an attack?"

Jackson nodded.

Rand turned to Mac. "But you've got to warn them! You can't let them go without a warning!"

"Warn them so Earth can hit at the same time and make the massacre twice as horrible?" Mac

asked bitterly. "We'll let the arrangement go like it is. The war has to come. Nothing we can do will stop it. It doesn't make any difference which side starts it."

"They're both human, you know," Jackson added dryly.

"But Carol! You can't—"

"Syntho-thinking, Mac," Jackson reminded the Irishman. "They can be tricky as hell. Don't let him convince you, he's swinging around to our side."

"He won't . . . Come on, Rand. You're going with us to smash the ship—where we can keep an eye on you."

Rand sprang up.

"Watch him!" Jackson cried.

Mac steadied the weapon, backed away.

"It's not working!" Rand exclaimed. "I'm not thought-monitored now, Mac! They were about to test all of us at the base in a general spy hunt. A liaison agent gave me an injection—one that stopped the secretions—and —"

Mac laughed. "I see what you mean." He glanced at Jackson. "Crafty as hell."

He motioned Rand toward the ship's ladder and fell in behind him, still maintaining a safe distance.

Rand mounted the inclined rungs and threw a leg into the ship.

As he lifted his other foot off the top metal bar, he hurled an impulse at the psychodynamic converter.

The protruding incline bolted back into its recess.

Mac's gun roared and searing flame erupted in Rand's shoulder. But he had already mentally ordered the closing of the hatch. It banged shut and he reeled over to the pilot's dock, gripping his shoulder where the slug had entered.

But the pain was snipped off shortly as his frantic deceleration below light speed activated the cabin's stasis shield.

How long? How much of his hour's reprieve from the synthetic gland had he used up? There couldn't be more than fifteen or twenty minutes of freedom left. Was it enough time to warn Satellite City of the impending attack? Was it enough time to tell Sanders he had to get Carol and the other civilians off?

THE searing pain in his shoulder gripped him with a vehemence as soon as the stasis shield collapsed. It was even magnified in the final decelerative bursts which carried him over the last few score miles to Satellite City.

Still maneuvering the ship on psycho-control, he ripped his sleeve

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and inspected the wound. The slug had gone through the fleshy part of his upper left arm. He used the severed sleeve to fashion a compress and bandage.

But even before he finished securing the knot in the cloth, the pain lessened unexpectedly. Apprehensive, he remembered that the synthetic hormones could deaden pain of external origin when it threatened interference at a critical time.

Then, already the effectiveness of the injection was passing! Hesitatingly, he concentrated on his intention to warn Satellite City of the imminent attack. In response, there was an ominous unrest throughout his body.

Fiery needles pressed their sharp points against a million tingling neurons, demanding that he relinquish the treacherous notion. But the torture was bearable in the absence of full strength of the secretions. He thought of something else. The needles withdrew themselves.

Rand maneuvered the ship to the Test dock at Satellite City and struggled with the hatch to enter the great disc-like station. The pain in his arm was less severe; the hateful fires that were beginning to rage in his body, more intense.

Finally he got the port opened. "Sorry, sir, but you're under

arrest."

The enlisted spaceman stood in the corridor, his hand resting cautiously on the butt of his weapon in its holster. He, and the other two behind him, glanced at the blood-soaked rag wrapped around Rand's shoulder, but said nothing.

One of them caught his arm to lead him off down the corridor.

A myriad volcanoes erupted and hurled streamers of lava along every nerve fibre in his body! They knew he was an agent! Why else would they arrest him?

"Take me to the skipper," Rand ordered. "I've got to see Captain Sanders!" The latter was a plea.

But his whole body was wracked by torturous protests to the traitorous action. Even though he hadn't mentally acknowledged the intent of giving the attack warning, the synthetic compulsion system seemed to know.

"Sorry, sir, but we had orders from Commander Clarkson to hold you in the brig until—"

The door at the end of the corridor burst open, disgorging first Sanders, then Ensign Drake.

"Dammit, Drake!" Sanders was saying. "I told you I was to be notified as soon as Number Two was sighted!"

Then he saw Rand and the three enlisted spacemen.

"Where the hell have you been?" He rushed over.

Rand summoned the words to inform him of the attack. But a wave of intense nausea swept over him and he fought a faint. The needles of fire were slashing across his chest and arms and through his head. A symphony of giant gongs reverberated in tumultuous discord in his brain.

"You realize," Sanders went on, enraged, "that this casts all suspicion on you as being the Colonist agent . . . We checked the M-crystal supply. Those two we found on your ship—where did they come from?"

The epithelial tortures were two-fold now. Not only were they fighting to prevent him from acting against the interest of the Colonists, but they were also injecting lethal fluids into his system. In addition, they were punishing him for his deviation from permissible action.

The fatal hell-fire flared at the base of his skull and spread upward to transform his brain into an inferno.

He tried to scream in agony. But he was not permitted a mere facial expression to relay to those about him his tortures—not yet.

"Why did you run away from the test, Jordan?" Sanders demanded.

"And why did you come back?" Drake asked.

HE summoned all the resolution he could find. Certainly he should be able to get the message through to them. The synthetic autacoidal organ *couldn't* be operating at maximum power now. Not enough time had elapsed since the injection.

Finally a convulsion of pain and horror flashed through his mask of hardened impassivity. He had won! He had broken the bond of non-expression!

"The Colonists are going to attack! Here—the Lunar communities—Earth! Their fleet's on the way!"

He had done it! He had betrayed the Colonists!

And the artificial conscience stirred tortures in his body that became unimaginable furies. Now they were sufficiently intense to subdue the epithelial secretions that insured outward calm.

He screamed.

"You *admit* you're an agent?" Drake asked incredulously.

Dazedly, Rand nodded, staggered. Two of the guards reached out and caught him.

"But how—how can you overcome the psycho-impulse destructor?" Sanders asked in disbelief.

"To hell with the destructor!" Rand shouted through the agony. "They're attacking! Now! Get Carol—and . . ."

He slumped to the floor, writh-

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ing, almost unconscious from the unbearable pain.

Sanders and Drake stared uncertainly at each other. Then the Captain erupted into action.

He snatched a gun from the holster of one of the enlisted men and handed it to Drake. "Get him out of the way—out of the Test area. But watch him! He could be lying about the attack to put us off guard so he can escape."

Sanders turned and strode for the door. "Come with me," he called back to the three guards. "I'll need you for messengers to help alert the fighting ships."

But before he reached the door, a communications officer raced in. "Captain! We've sighted an unidentified fleet beyond the Lunar orbit! Moving in fast as hell!"

Sanders caught his arm and pulled him back outside with him. The three spacemen followed.

The agony seemed to subside briefly and Rand looked up at Drake through clouded eyes. The Ensign stared in bewilderment at him for a moment then extended an arm and pulled him to his feet.

Rand was conscious of being half-carried out the Test building. Why, he wondered, wasn't he steel-ed for action—for an attempt to escape from entrapment? The se-cretions were supposed to insure his death only when it was appar-ent he couldn't escape. But there

was a chance now! It was possi-ble he could overcome his sole captor—Drake.

Yet, the synthetic compulsion to frantic action remained elusively absent. Was it because his treach-ery was a stimulus that had insured his vengeful death by the secre-tions, regardless of what the other factors in the situation were?

Outside, Drake half-dragged him away from the entrance to the Test building, letting him drop to the ground near the area of shrubs and trees.

Desperately, he searched his crazed conscious for the will to at-tempt an escape, only vaguely hop-ing that escape would bring an end to the inner excruciations — the lightning fury that was striking le-thally at every organ, every cell.

OVERHEAD, the huge green-blue globe that was the Earth hung like a fantastic jewel, seemingly poised above the cen-tral buildings of Satellite City.

Sirens sounded, their echoes wailing against the half-mile high transparent dome. Although he couldn't see it, he could sense the frantic activity in the heart of the Satellite.

Then scores of air-cars rose from the surface, carrying civilians toward the escape ports along the rim of the great disc.

Almost in line with the edge of

the gigantic transparent circle, perhaps two thousand miles out, scores of infinitesimal-pin-points of light elongated into hair-thin streaks; they curved in toward the disc like flaming hair streaming from the head of an invisible ogre.

Abruptly the grouping of streaks divided—half continuing on their present arc, the other half branching off toward the planet.

"Are you a Colonist, Rand?" Drake asked, not taking his eyes from the attacking fleet.

But Rand's face was contorted with pain as he fought the excruciations that were sapping his life out of him.

"I know that ordinarily the syntho-gland would keep you from answering," Drake went on. "But hell, you did make the admission to Sanders, didn't you?"

The words were lost against the infernal pounding of his tormented pulse in his ears.

Satellite City shook furiously as the anchored defending fleet tore loose at a dozen ports, some of the ships feeding their hungry drive jets even before they had completely broken free from the magnetic grapples.

The conflagration in his brain seemed to decrease a bit more as Rand watched the fleet, grouping as it withdrew, rush out to meet the attackers.

"Rand! Rand!"

He turned his burning head and twisted his tortured body around to watch Carol come rushing forward.

"Oh, Rand!" She threw herself on the ground beside him. "Dad said you were here. He said you were—"

A sob ended the sentence.

"Go, Carol!" he gasped. "They are evacuating! You've got—"

"You'd better leave, Miss Sanders," Drake advised.

Satellite City roared and shook again and they looked up through the transparent dome to see a dozen red and white striped civilian evacuation ships blast off.

"All the civilian ships," Drake continued, "are supposed to be off within ten minutes."

But she only clung tighter to Rand.

"You—you didn't tell them—about me?" he asked.

She shook her head vigorously and disheveled hair whipped across moist cheeks, some of it clinging there.

"I—I couldn't. I thought—I hoped you'd get away. But you came back, Rand. Oh, Rand! Why did you have to come back!"

She sobbed and buried her face against his chest.

The contingent of Colonist ships that had branched off reached their targets first.

Horrified, Rand watched the streaks swoop down low—close to the atmospheric blanket of the planet, like a swarm of hornets.

A brief flash of orange-white brilliancy lighted up the East Coast with a fierceness more intense than the daylight that cloaked half the visible surface. The center of the flame had flared over the eastern end of Long Island Sound—an almost direct hit on New York City.

Three sparks flashed next—almost simultaneously. One of them, he guessed, was over Chicago. The other two were on the dark side of the day-night crescent that split the North American continent.

Against the shadowy surface, they flared like brilliant, scintillating gems. He wondered what cities they represented.

Then, bewildered, he realized that in witnessing the attack he had almost forgotten his pain!

ABRUPTLY, he moved Carol aside and sat up, confounded.

It had been almost a half-hour since he had exposed himself as a Colonist agent. And yet he was not dead! Moreover, the tortures that had wracked his body, although still painful, were no longer unbearable!

He touched his injured shoulder. Now the physical hurt was above the relative threshold of percep-

tion. It was no longer over-shadowed by the intense internal convulsions.

"Your arm!" Carol gasped, staring at the bandage.

"It—I think it'll be all right," he answered dully. Then he started. The inner agonies had decreased to the point where he could almost ignore them.

He glanced at Drake. The Ensign was standing rigid, agape, the gun hanging from his limp hand. He was apparently oblivious of the imminent attack—the danger to Satellite City.

Oustide, in the black of space only hundreds of miles away, the attacking and defending fleets were locked in a wild, surging, furious battle that had turned the peaceful void into a pinwheel of blazing rocket-trace swirls and brilliant explosions:

Satellite City wrenched violently and Carol grasped him in terror as he lunged up. Wind swirled around him and his ears popped.

"The rim!" Drake rasped. "The rim's been hit—punctured! We're losing air!"

Rand seized her hand and started to rush back into the Test building, remembering that all of the units along the rim were hermetically sealed for such emergencies.

But suddenly he was aware of the whining "C" note in his brain. It built up to a climactic pitch and

stopped abruptly. He whirled around.

Paula was running forward, a gun in her hand pointed at him.

Her appearance seemed to jolt Drake from his lethargy.

"Watch him!" Paula ordered. "He's a traitor!"

She had directed the order at Drake! Rand turned to see the Ensign bring his gun up again to cover him.

"I—I feel—different," Drake said, half dazed.

"Of course you do." Paula stood by his side and motioned Rand and Carol toward the Test building.

The pressure was falling fast. Rand could tell it by the continued popping of his ears.

"Rand," Carol began, bewildered. "I—"

"Shut up!" Paula snapped, shoving her forward with Rand toward the building entrance.

"But why?" Drake asked puzzledly. "What's happened?"

"War's started. That's why Jordan isn't dying, as he was a few minutes ago. The usefulness of an agent, in interplanetary intrigue, ends when war starts. The synthetic gland is capable of a secretion that's used only one time—when the syntho-thinker is convinced that all-out war has started. That secretion destroys the gland and allows it to be absorbed into the body and eliminated as any

other organic waste is.

"The final effect of the absorption is that the agent is left with only a vague incentive to get back to Colonist territory as best he can."

"Then," Drake asked, "it's all over? The effects of the gland are finished? Is that why I feel so odd?"

"The effects of the gland are finished. But our duty to the Colonist government isn't. Jordan knows a source of M-crystals. But he's betrayed us. Now he's going to take us to the source."

DRAKE opened the Test building door and a sustained blast of air rushed out. But Paula prodded Rand and Carol with the weapon's muzzle and they fought their way inside against the gale.

Satellite City lurched violently and shuddered frightfully.

"There won't be *any* air left out there after *that* one," Drake observed.

Two enlisted spacemen darted from a side compartment into the corridor in front of them. Draped across their arms were bulky space suits.

Carol screamed a warning.

They whirled and Drake shot them.

"We don't need her," the Ensign said, motioning to Carol.

"She served a good purpose

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then," Paula dissented. "They wouldn't have hesitated shooting us down if the Captain's daughter hadn't been with us."

He shrugged and they continued on to the air-lock at the Number Two's port.

Suddenly the building—all of Satellite City—wrenched and jerked and shuddered fiercely. Rand held desperately on to the stanchion at the port and clung determinedly to Carol's hand, her surging weight pulling painfully against his injured arm.

Drake and Paula, in mid-corridor, were thrown roughly against the overhead. The Ensign thrashed air to steady his erratic spinning; he lost the weapon. His cartwheeling body rammed into Paula and sent her flying down the corridor.

Carol screamed.

"It was a direct hit!" Rand exclaimed. "They got the gravity system!"

Paula, unconscious, floated limply in the air. Drake half-kicked, half-swam toward the weapon that drifted away ahead of him.

The jarring motion of the Satellite steadied and Rand fumbled with the hatch lock. He got it open and pulled Carol with him into the Number Two.

"Feel like taking a trip?" he asked, after he had secured the hatch.

"We can't stay here," she observed hopelessly while he strapped her into one of the pilot docks. "You can't stay anywhere on Earth territory . . . And, the Colonies I don't know, Rand."

He fastened the harness around his shoulders and fed power to the normal drive tubes, activating the M-drive at the same time.

"I wasn't thinking of either—of those—places," he said, fighting the force of acceleration.

Outside, the fleets whipped and surged in wild conflict. One of the darting arcs of orange flame swept in close to Satellite City, then out and away again.

Two seconds later, the huge disk convulsed viciously amid an eruption of flame and a huge gap appeared in the rim among disintegrating metal. In some of the half-forms flying through space, Rand recognized fragments of the Test Section.

ALMOST three hours later the rustic planet, bathed in brilliant light cast by twin moons, materialized under the ship.

Rand flung off the harness and leaped from the dock.

"Where are we?" Carol asked, staring puzzledly out the port.

He finished unbuckling her straps and sent out the mental impulse to open the hatch.

"Home," he said, smiling.

Urella and scores of plainly clad people stood around the ship, waiting, as they went down the ladder.

Mac and Jackson pushed their way through the crowd.

"I had an idea you'd be back, Rand boy," the big Irishman said, smiling, "even despite that synthetic stuff."

Rand turned and stared back into the ship for a moment, remembering a final detail. He concentrated on the M-drive destructor.

Seconds later, billows of black smoke poured out of the hatch.

Carol tugged at his hand. "But, Rand—I don't understand. There's McGough! And—"

He turned to Mac. "Later, you can tell her about the monkeys starting out at the south pole . . . Later—not now."

He pulled Carol to him. Now another business was in order.

And the natives smiled embarrassedly as they watched it transpire.

THE END



"You're nothing but a great big hairy slob!"

The Queen of Space

By

Joseph Slotkin

Helen LaTour had the best hip wriggle in galactic Burleyque. In fact, it was so good she hipped herself smack into another dimension! . . .

I WAS relaxin' with my second Plutonian Stinger in the dignified atmosphere of Charley's Venusian Retreat when there was this strange noise outside the dive, like a flock of hot jets hittin' the atmosphere. Right after a character comes bustin' through the door.

He looks behind him, scared-like, wipin' his forehead with a handkerchief as big as one of Charley's tablecloths, only cleaner. He stops near my table.

"I beg your pardon, would you mind if I joined you?"

"Listen, buster, if you got a ulterior motif, such as a touch, you kin hop a jet, and—" I starts. Then I get a really good look, and hear myself sayin', "Hey, you don't look so good. Maybe you better sit down."

"Thank you, oh thank you very much," he says, floppin' onto one

of Charley's flexible plastic stools.

"Well, I guess I kin maybe be a sucker and go fer just one," I says, while he is still mutterin' somethin' to hisself. "Waiter! Hey, mug!" I turns back to the little fella, feelin' real expansive, like they say.

"What'll be your pleasure, buster?"

"Oh, but please allow me."

Well, this is a new angle—a panhandler puttin' hisself on the pan. But far be it from me to refuse a barroom curtsy, so I orders another Jupiter sling.

"I'll have two of those drinks on your tray," the little guy pipes up to the waiter. And the mug, who is also one of Charley's best bouncers, almost drops his load.

"Hey, mister, these here's Plutonian stingers," the waiter yells.

"Y'know what's in them things,



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fella?" I chimes in. "They get ground vesicantus herbs from Pluto, and—"

"Oh, what difference does it make?" The little guy looked mournful. "He'll get me sooner or later, and then—"

"He?" Maybe I had this little guy all wrong. Maybe he was a nut that had decided to bolt.

"Yes. Perhaps you heard that heat ray gun being discharged, just as I came in."

"Oh. So that's what them noises was."

"Yes. Wherever I go, *he* shoots at me. Waits for me to leave the building, and then shoots at me."

"Well, mister, again it's none a my business, but—if you're carryin' any asteroids around—they kin be cashed anywhere. Lots of guys would take pot shots at ya."

"Oh, Luigi isn't interested in my—money."

"Luigi?" That name sent shudders goin' around my curvature.

"Precisely." He gives with a long sigh. "I've been dodging him for some time now."

"Mister," I says, "everybody knows what a dangerous guy Luigi is. Why, they got his mug on the wanted wall in every space station from here to the outer galaxies."

"Yes, I presume they have."

"I figure one of these days the cops is gonna pin enough on him

to make him look like a astronavigator's space map," I adds.

"Oh, I doubt if the space control will ever have the opportunity to apprehend him here on Venus. This is still a wild, mostly unsettled planet, you know. And besides, Luigi is too smart," says this little guy, like he knows Luigi personal.

"Yeh, he sure is. Uh—what's he got on you?"

THE little guy reaches over like he doesn't know he's takin' the Plutonian stinger right from under me nose, and says sort of thoughtful-like, "He thinks I stole his girl."

"Yeh. Yeh, sure, that would make *any* fella ma—" I starts, then it seeps through, and I looks at this little, skinny, runty guy, only I can't laugh.

"Oh, I didn't of course. But the fact that she was last seen entering my apartment, and that she never left it, at least not visibly—well, that makes it terribly difficult to convince him—"

"Now wait a minute—"

"Oh, I don't expect anyone to believe me, anymore. Sometimes I find it hard to believe myself."

"D-do you know who Luigi's gal is?" I finally stutters.

"Was," he corrects, mournful-like. This sort of scared me.

Either this guy was the kind of crank they never use to wind up a cold jet, or women had changed a lot since the last time I enriched my culture by attending a performance of Flossie's Follies at the Little Venus Circuit Burly-que.

"Mister, I ain't lookin' fer no trouble," I mutters, edgin' back on my stool.

"Oh, but I assure you, I'm tellin' the truth."

"Helen LaTour, the terrific blonde," I says, meaningful-like.

"The same."

"The queen of the burly circuit," I goes on, without realizin' that I am stretched halfway across the table, shoutin' into his ear because of a slight argument going on down the bar. "The most luscious hunk of stuff that ever shook a notion to go on the stage," I enlarges. "Right out of this world," I finishes up. "Right?"

"Precisely. Right out of this world."

"In your apartment?"

"In my apartment."

Now, I figures that maybe he was one of these here not-so-juvenile delinquents what believes that if they can't have it, they can at least kill it, so I starts edgin' away, but 'then I gets a sudden thought.

"You sure the cops ain't on your trail, bud?"

"No, but if Luigi doesn't get me, it's only a matter of time until they will be. After all, anyone such as her, disappearing—"

"I thought she was out of town."

"No. Just out of this world."

Them words take on a sinister-like significance, the way he says them. Then he gets up, sober-lookin' in spite of them Plutonian stingers that would of disintegrated even a Martian.

"If you wouldn't mind running the risk, I'd appreciate your company. I'm going back to my place now. The — ah — refreshments here lack the needed stimulation. I have a much better supply home."

Now, maybe it was that stinger and the Uranus delight, because under ordinary circumstances I would turn down such a invite from a guy who is no doubt a no-orbit meteorite. But then I realize—he's invitin' me to his apartment where, accordin' to his story, the luscious LaTour, queen of the strip world, has not been seen since. So I gives in.

WHEN we reaches his apartment, he snaps on the lights, like he was nervous somebody might be hidin' inside; and locks the door tight. I watch close. He leaves the key in the lock, which makes me feel some easier.

He has quite a nice little joint.

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Not gaudy, but nice. He goes to one bookshelf, presses a button, and a shelf slides back. Inside, he's got enough wiggle water to fill all the Martian canals and irrigate the Moon.

Well, we're heisting a couple, and then he starts talkin' like we was never interrupted.

"Please forgive me for not introducing myself sooner, but under the circumstances—My name is Timothy J. Brown, M.D., Ph. D., M.A. and A.B."

"Oh. Well, me monicker is Benjamin Spelvin, but you kin call me Benny."

"Very well—uh—Benny. I am, you see, a psychiatrist."

"Oh, yeh. But you'd never be able to figure *me* out, Doc. I got so many bumps on my head from hittin' th' anti-gravitational screens on the jets during free fall—"

He laughs. "No, that would be a phrenologist you're thinking of, Benny. I'm concerned mainly with psychological abnormalities and mal-adjustments of the psyche; I'm also known as something of an expert in the more physical science of phenomenology," he adds modest-like.

Now all this adds up to minus zero to me, but I'm sittin' in a comfortable apartment in the better section of Venus, I got me a glass of Uranus Number Eight, Vin-

tage 2480, so I lets the little fellow ramble on. Finally I says, "Uh, Mister—uh, Doc, you was sayin' somethin' about Helen LaTour, the strip—"

"Oh, oh yes, I was coming to that. Well, now—uh, where was I? Oh, yes.... Benny, these were the events that brought me, a modest scientist, into contact with this Luigi and that—uh—delectable creature, Miss Helen LaTour. And I'll leave it to you to decide for yourself that I am telling the truth."

NOT so long ago (the Professor starts out) I was visited here by a rather attractive young woman who told me her name was Helen LaTour.

It is true, she had called me first on the telescreen, and at the sight of that lovely—um—face, obviously mirroring distress, I assumed that, having heard of my reputation she had sought me out for—um—treatment.

Still, it was rather—um—disturbing to me to be interrupted by this beautiful young woman while I was in the midst of my studies.

"I'm grateful to you fer seein' me, P'fessor, honest I am," she began, seating herself immediately, and crossing her—um—quite shapely legs . . . er, limbs, that is.

"Well, Miss—uh—LaTour, was—

n't it?"

"Yeah. Helen LaTour. You heard of me 'way up here on Venusian Heights?"

"The—ah—name has a familiar ring. But I must remind you, I have restricted my practice to native Venusians."

"Yeah, sure, Doc. Still, I figured you, bein' an Earth man, and me a Earth woman, well—patriotism . . . "

Her eyes were indeed lovely, gazing at me so appealingly, and I must confess she aroused my—um—sense of Earthy—that is, Earthy—um—patriotism.

"Uh—just what can I do for you, Miss LaTour?"

"I dunno yet, doc. I'm happy in my work. I got a swell boy friend, name of Luigi, maybe you heard of him? No? Well, I got no reason to be unhappy, and yet —"

"Just a moment, please. What is your work?"

"Doc, I been known in the strip tease game as the Queen of the Solid Shake."

"You are—er—a night club dancer?"

"Night clubs? Nah, I never leave the boards, Doc. I got my own circuit, my agent takes good care of my bookings, and my wardrobe is the envy of ingenues from Mercury to Pluto."

"You—act?"

"Yeah. Plenty of action, Doc."

"Just what type of—er—roles do you play?"

"I'm a tease artist, Doc. I take it off. Strip."

Every word this remarkable young lady uttered was punctuated by the most fluid and expressive movements of her—um—agile—um—body, but I must confess I was becoming more and more—er—confused.

"Want a demonstration?"

By now, I had begun to gather what she meant, and hastily asserted that such a procedure would be unnecessary.

"Well, Doc, I'm solid sender, see? Hep with the jet . . . Right out of this world."

"Yes?"

"That's just the trouble. I *been* right out of this world."

"You have dreams?"

"I dunno. Lemme explain. I'm opening next week after a layoff on Earth, see? Them Earthmen are gettin' sorta tame, but we figure these Venusians will appreciate what I got to offer when they come in after a long, muggy day at them cold uranium mines, see?"

I commented that I had made some notations about the working conditions of the native Venusians comparing them, especially atmospherically, to the phenomenon of

what is known on Earth as ACM—ancient, California smog.

"Yeah, sure, sure, Doc. Well, they got the whole show at the Little Venus Theater built around my number. I got my whole new wardrobe, with the special anti-gravity zippers, some classy plastic bubbles, and a special arrangement cooked up by Ziggy, the trumpeter from Mercury. They're billing me tops, and I figured out a routine that's a sure sensation. I been practicing it all during my vacation.

"I even been holding off Luigi so I could practice," Miss LaTour said.

"Luigi—that's your boy friend's name?"

"Yeah," she laughed, and added, "I been practicin' by myself so much he thinks I been cheatin' on him." She winked her lovely eye at me.

"Well, you should see this number," she said. "It begins with me wigglin' like this."

SHE began to swing about the room. I had to confess to myself that, standing there, her dark eyes flashing, her long, rather—uh—shapely legs, and—um—well, it was obvious that if anyone were better qualified to interpret love, I had never seen it. But as I observed her closely, she

seemed truly agitated.

"Why, I even learned a couple of new languages, so I could sing a part of my song in each language—one from each planet."

"Er—I believe we can dispense with that."

"But that's just it, Doc. I gotta tell you about it. It's all sort of symbolic, see? A sort of United Planets number. The idea is that all of the planets are held together by love, real, solid love, the kind that grips you."

It was most apparent to me at that juncture that her—um—talents *were*, of the—um—gripping variety.

I begged her, however, to come to the source of her difficulty.

"Well, the number's comin' along terrific. I got it down perfect, every movement, every swing and every sway. I feel I reached a new peak in my art, when—just a couple of days ago—it happens."

I begged her to be explicit.

"Well, I'm doing the routine in my dressing room, see? First the singing as a tease, see? Then the bubbles, then I start playin' with the anti-gravity zippers, see? Well, I get my skirt off, and then my blouse, and I've got panties and a brassiere, of course, using the skirt as a kind of screen, see? Well, there I am—"

"Yes?"

"In my panties and bra, of course."

"Of course."

"Usin' the skirt as a sort of a fan, see? Then I get to the part where I suddenly lift the skirt over my head, and I give a sort of wiggle—well, it ain't a wiggle, exactly, with my hips, and then—"

"Yes, yes, and then, Miss LaTour?"

"That's it, Doc," she said unhappily. "That's when it happened. One minute I was standin' there in my room, practicin', and then—the room wasn't there anymore."

I watched her closely—observing her reactions, of course.

"Where do you suppose the room went?"

"I dunno. It just wasn't there."

"And—uh—where were you?"

"That's the funniest part of it. I didn't seem to be in a room at all. I seemed to be in a large, open space and, Doc, *there was sand under my feet!*"

Her particular hallucination began to take coherent—um—shape in my mind, now.

"You say there was sand under your feet—and you were out-of-doors?"

"Like in some sort of desert, Doc. And Doc—*there was someone coming toward me!*"

"I see. A—man, doubtless."

"Yeah, yeah! And when he saw me standing there, he came rushing at me. Well, I remembered I didn't have much on, so I lowered my skirt."

"I see. And this man. He—chased you?"

"Well—no. When I lowered my skirt, he stopped."

"He—stopped."

"Yeah. Well, I figures here's a man, and I got my new routine, let's try it out. So I raised my skirt again, watching his face, and went on from there."

"On. From there. I see."

"And Doc," She became intensely excited, and I must confess I found it fairly difficult to preserve my own calm, "when I went through that hip-sway, his face became dim, and then sort of cloudy, and then, in a flash, there I was back in my room again just as if it never had happened."

I SAID, "Miss LaTour, tell me, when you were a child, were you always imagining that men would turn around to look at you: that is, that they were always looking at you?"

"They *were*," she stated flatly. "Hey—you think I'm imagining I was somewhere else? Well, you're wrong, Doc. I was on a desert, I tell you—and what's more, when I got back in my room, there was

sand on the bottom of my slippers!"

"Of course," I soothed her. "I'm not arguing with you at all."

"Look—" She became vehement. "I'll do my routine right here, in front of you, and you'll see—".

I pleaded with her that this was entirely unnecessary, but she began to walk enticingly about the room, humming some tune.

I was shocked at first, but in spite of myself, the eternal attraction of the feminine form asserted itself, and I watched the rest of the proceedings with, I must admit, keen interest. Miss LaTour was indeed a—um—skillful young woman, and generously equipped to prove her points.

"You see now?" She was standing before me, holding her skirt over her head, scantily clothed otherwise. "Just about now, I go into my new hip-sway, like this, and—"

And then she was gone.

She had begun an enticing—indeed, fascinating wiggle of as excellently rounded a pair of hips as I had ever seen, and then, without warning of any sort, she had vanished.

Well, you can imagine how perturbed I was. I searched the entire apartment thoroughly. For a moment I was inclined to believe it was merely an hallucination of

my own. But there was the evidence of the clothing she had already—um—shed, lying on the floor, to prove my own sanity.

Then I thought of the drinking cabinet I—ah—keep here for my patients, and I turned to it with shaking hands. As I was pouring myself a Uranian Delight, I heard her voice suddenly, and the glass crashed from my hands.

"I'm back, Doc."

Indeed, there she was, standing as she had before; her skirt raised about her head with one hand, and in the other what looked like *some sort of human hand!*

"Guess where I was this time."

I confess I was shaking violently, but she laughed, and approached me coquettishly, showing me what appeared on closer examination to be an artifact of some sort, rather like a metal glove. As I peered at it she sighed deeply.

"What a knight!"

"Extraordinary, but I fancied I heard you say, 'What a night!'"

"That's what I said, Doc."

"But you've only been gone about five minutes. How can you say—?"

"Search me. All I know is, I just spent the last three hours with a knight."

"A night, in a few hours! How—?"

"I said 'knight'. The kind that

rides a horse—you know.”

I stared at her, but she was coyly putting on her clothes, a half-smile on her lovely face.

“He was so sweet, Doc. Talked a kind of funny French, but I could understand enough to intuition the rest — Anyhow, after awhile I remembered you’d be worried about me, so I sneaked out of his castle, and went through my routine up to the point where I wiggle my hips—and here I am.”

“But—where *were* you?”

“Search me. He said his name was Launcelot.”

“What?”

“Launcelot. That’s what he said his name was. That’s a pretty name.” She giggled, “I wonder what Luigi would say.”

I WAS shocked, but then the full significance of this young lady’s strange powers flooded over me. I regarded her seriously.

“Miss LaTour, do you realize what you’ve accomplished by a mere wiggle of your hips?”

She paused in fastening the garter to her filmy stocking. “I built up quite a reputation. I know that.”

I fired her with my glance. “At first I thought perhaps you were suffering from—well, no matter. Now, either we’re both mad, or you’ve penetrated the fourth di-

mension and bridged space and time.”

She appeared highly uninterested. “That’s fine, Doc. Uh—my seams straight? Thanks. Now if you kin figure out some way to get that—what did you call it? Oh, yeah, penetration—out of my act, everything’ll be O. K. After all, I got my cash customers to consider.”

“Oh, your act is unimportant now,” I said excitedly. “Consider what this means to science! With that little—ah—wiggle of your hips you’ve found a warp in space that’s projected you into another time sphere, proportionately co-existent with our own!”

“That’s great, Doc. Now that you know how I do it, how about helping me to get rid of it? Although—” She hesitated. “I *would* like to see Launce again. I wonder if he’s married?”

“Perhaps,” I mused, “this phenomenon manifested itself here on Venus and not when you were on Earth because of the peculiar orbit of the Venusian—” And then I realized she was waiting for me to answer her.

“Launcelot? I—uh—think he’s been carrying on an affair with a lady named—um—Guinevere.”

“A two-timer, huh?”

I avoided this trend in the conversation. “Miss LaTour, appar-

ently it depends where you do your —um—contortions. Apparently in your dressing-room you emerged onto a desert. While in my apartment, it brought you straight into an ancient age—”

“Hot asteroids, so that’s it!” Her lovely face was suffused with an unmistakable eagerness. “Look, Doc, supposin’ I come up here again some time, so I can see him again?”

I was properly outraged. “Hardly! Come to my apartment so that you can carry on an affair with a man dead for thousands of years? Certainly not!”

She was puzzled. “He didn’t seem dead to me.”

“Miss LaTour!” I was desperate. “Do you realize what this would mean to science?” I tried to explain to her, “For centuries, man has tried to find the answer to the secrets of the action of mass subject to certain movements at certain speeds, knowing that mass and energy were identical—”

“I coulda given them the answer any time they wanted to catch me at the Little Venus Burlyque,” she retorted fliply. “I use plenty of energy, but, brother, I never waste a movement.”

“Please, young lady, this flip-pant attitude toward science—”

“What do I care about science? All I want is my routine. Now, can

you hep me to what’s putting the crimp in my act, so’s I can iron out that there fourth-dimensional wiggle?”

“I’d have to study this peculiar phenomenon much more closely —”

“Nothin’ doin’! You seen all you’re going to!”

“But you don’t understand,” I pleaded.

“Lissen! I built myself up from a walk-on in the chorus. Worked hard, see? Figured out my own bumps and grinds and hip-rolls, just so’s I could make myself the biggest tease name in the galaxy. And now, what goes? I got what you call a fourth-dimensional wiggle that gets me out through somebody’s space warp into somebody’s back yard who lived before I was born! This here thing’s warpin’ my personality. I’m fed up,” she cried.

I was frantic. “But you’ve a debt to society—”

“Lissen. I pay my debt every time I walk out on that stage. Think of all the men I make forget they’re married, or their office, or factory or farm troubles—or their income taxes! How would *they* feel, if I disappeared in the middle of my strip? They want to see *more* of me, not *less*!

“I thought maybe you could help me lick this thing—whatever you

call it. But under that beard you're just like all them other guys. I'm fed up on double talk. Let's just forget the whole thing, Doc. Good-by, professor!"

And with that, she flounced out of my apartment.

WELL, the little guy stopped talkin', then, and takes another drink and I find I been sittin' on the edge of my chair, like I was stymied by a paralaray.

"B-but—you said that she disappeared from here," I says like a guy in a trance.

"Oh yes indeed," he smiles at me. "I was too wrapped up in her by then to let her off so easily."

"Y'mean—you followed her up?"

"I felt sure that if I could just see her again, and explain the value of her peculiar, indeed amazing talent, to science—well, at any rate I knew where to go. I had never in all my life frequented one of those burlesque houses.

"After the performance I endeavored to see her backstage. That was when I had my first brush with Mr. Luigi."

"Tough character, ain't he?"

"Extremely so. He warned me not to bother her, and when I tried to explain, he threatened me.

"And then one evening," the little guy says, settling back in his chair with a hooker of Saturnian

Sling, and that far-away look in his eyes again, "just when I least expected it, my robot butler announced her.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've changed your mind, Miss LaTour," I greeted her. "And now if you're ready, we can continue our experiments without further delay."

"Nix, doc, I ain't here for any more experiments," were her first words.

"I was non-plussed. 'You're not? Then why did you—?'

"Oh, I dunno. I been practisin' that space-warpin' hip-wiggle in private, see? And I been meetin' all sorts of characters. But not the one I got a real interest in."

"I sensed trouble. 'Miss LaTour, if you've come here for—'

"I'm getting bored, Doc. Luigi's gettin' too jealous. Why he even thinks that you—" She leered at me archly. "Well, never mind. But them few hours I spent with that there Launcelot—"

"She began to hum a few bars of the song she used in her—um—routine, despite my pleas.

"Miss LaTour, please don't begin that again!"

"What're ya kickin' about, professor? You're gettin' a free show, ain'tcha? At least up to a point y'are—"

"Please, Miss LaTour, put on that blouse. I must warn you—"

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"Her lovely bare arms stopped their gyrations. 'Huh? Warn me? About what?'

"That time and space are really fluid, as that ancient philosopher, Einstein, suspected back in the Twentieth Century. You may not reach the same time-space continuum again. Why, you may even —um—wiggle yourself into the middle of a Pharaoh's tomb—or perhaps the bottom of the ocean which now covers what used to be ancient Russia!"

"I'll take my chances, Doc. Hmm . . . Hmmm . . . Pretty good, huh?"

"I implore you, Miss LaTour!"
"Despite my desperate efforts, she began to remove another of her—um—garments."

"Da de da, my bra. Da de daa doo, my shoe. And now, Launcelot, honey, here I—"

"She had come to the hip-wiggle that curiously projected her through some warp in space. There was a sound as though a rubber tube were being sucked inside out—and she vanished."

THE little fella emptied his glass and filled it again.

"I waited for what seemed an eternity. But she never reappeared, to this very day."

I takes another slug of that Martian wiggle-water myself, then

I squints at the professor over my glass.

"I guess maybe you been hittin' the bottle yourself lately, huh Doc?"

"What? Oh, you don't believe me, do you, Benny?"

"Well, it ain't that exactly, but ya gotta admit—"

He gets excited again. "Here, I'll show you." He goes to a drawer, takes somethin' soft and shiny out, and comes back, wavin' them under my nose. My nose doesn't object.

"I have proof. Take a look at these."

They was Helen LaTour's size, all right. I gotta admit that, okay. And they *was* pretty. Especially when I starts thinkin' of what filled 'em.

"She left them behind when she went through that space-warp. It's all there is left of her."

"Hmmm. Say, doc, y'sure these ain't some other dame's? Maybe yer wife's—?"

"I assure you, I have never been married." He looks wistful-like. "Since meeting Miss LaTour, I grant you I have toyed with the speculation of what marital bliss might have been like with someone of the caliber of—"

Just then, the window behind me pops open with a crash that breaks it into a zillion pieces, and into

the room steps Luigi.

I couldn't of been more scared if I'd started seeing snakes, which I had, since Luigi looks like the meanest kind of viper in the zoo.

"Okay, pop," he snarls, deadly-like. "Where ya keepin' her?"

The little guy doesn't even turn a hair, whiles I'm startin' to get rid of all the stuff I been drinkin', reflex-like, so's I'll be lighter fer the takeoff when I kin get my feet unfroze.

"How did you get here?" the prof inquires, cool like a cucumber.

"I climbed in through that there space warp you been warblin' about," Luigi sneers, and I can see he is in a definitely unsociable mood.

"You!" he hollers, looking at where I was before he hollered, and when I come down off the top of the bookcase he says, "What do you know about it?"

"Luigi," I peeps, "I ain't never seen this guy until tonight."

"He's telling the truth, Luigi," the little guy says, and I coulda kissed him fer it.

"Okay, pop. So now that you're talkin', start singin'. And it better be on the level, too. What did you do with my gal? C'mon, spill it, or you'll be spillin' more than words."

"I told you the truth the first

time," the little guy says, with terrific dignity fer a future corpse.

I thought Luigi would bust a jet-gasket, but all of a sudden he calms down, and gets an expression on his puss like a tiger tryin' to smile.

"Look pop," he says, "I know how it is." And he's almost begin' now. "I know LaTour! She's gotta have a change once't in a while. But I love that dame, see? And I gotta have her back. So if you'll just tell me where she is, I'm willin' to forget all about ev erythin' else—"

The little guy just looks at him sort of pitying-like. "I assure you I'd like to help you, Luigi, but—"

He stops, with his mouth open, his eyes poppin' out of his head. He's starin' at somethin' behind me and Luigi's.

I hears a low, silvery laugh, kinda like little bells tinklin', and the kinda voice you figure that there pie-eyed piper musta had on his flute, is sayin':

"Well! Hello, suckers!"

When Luigi hears that laugh, he whirls around like a weathercock on top of a landship station, his face all red and puffed up.

"Baby!" He gets that far, then his eyes start to pop out. Mine are already rollin' on the rug.

Standin' there, laughin' like she

is havin' the time of her luscious life, is the Queen of Burly-que, Helen LaTour herself, in, what I mean, the flesh.

She is holdin' some white sort of a robe or somethin' over her head, and aside from that, she ain't got a stitch on that knockout of a body of hers.

Luigi gets his wind back, and starts gettin' tough again. "So you been two-timin' me fer this old goat here, huh?"

"I assure you, this is as much of a shock to me—"

But the LaTour ain't payin' them no attention. She pulls the robe half over her, and gives with that tinklin' laugh again.

"I didn't expect to come back here," she chuckles. "I made a mistake."

"Where you been?" Luigi moves towards her, like he was gonna hit her.

"Don't you take another step, you lug!"

She sure knew how to handle men. Luigi stops like he's been slugged by a Uranian, and his face gets all purple and pleading.

"Aw come on, babe, gimme a break. Ain't you been hangin' out with this little jerk long enough?"

"Th-that garment—" The little guy is starin' at the robe LaTour is holdin' over the better parts of her. "That white robe

—where did you get it?" he sorta wheezed.

"This? Oh, this old thing. It's just part of my old wardrobe. The guy I married gave it to me."

"You—what?" Luigi's puss turn's from purple to pale white. "You ain't married?"

"Oh, no?" LaTour looks at him like he's a Venusian rain-worm, and the lug goes into another Technicolor trance.

"But I'm gettin' fed up already," she yawns. "I met a fella's got a lot more S.A. than the guy I'm hitched to now. Yeah," she giggles, "My new fella knows how to appreciate a gal. Why, he even judged a beauty contest once."

"You take that jet line to Atlantic City, baby?" Luigi says.

The LaTour laughs, and catches the little guy's eye. "Professor, tell this jerk here what I'm talkin' about."

The little guy nods. "So that's why you didn't come back," he says.

"Yeah. I been promised to my new fella, and I ain't one to break a promise."

"The apple of discord," the little guy is mutterin'. "'Twas ever thus, my dear. But why are you here now?"

"I been tellin' my new boy friend, about show business. He kept beggin' me to do my stuff,

and I finally gave in. Right after we eloped—maybe it's the ham in me or somethin', but I did my routine fer him, and I guess I musta forgot and added that extra wiggle.

"I figured he had it comin'," she says. "Anyhow, here I am."

"And you'll stay here now, baby, wherever you been?" For a tough guy, Luigi sure looked soft-boiled, now.

The LaTour gave him a look that ain't had the benefit of Ivory Soap. "I'm goin' back."

"Aw, baby . . ."

"I can speak their language fine now. Besides, there's gonna be hell to pay because we eloped. And I gotta stick by Paris."

"You goin' to France, Miss La-Tour?" I blurts out.

SHE laughs. Luigi is scowlin', but the little professor is just noddin' like he understands everything.

"I been there, fella," she says to me. "I been everywhere." She starts to hum a song I ain't never heard before.

"This here's LaTour's farewell tour, men," she says, startin' to do some fancy movin' around that makes my skin crawl, watchin' her.

"Baby, you ain't gonna start your routine here, are ya?" Luigi

says.

"Shut up, creep, I gotta concentrate," she squelches him.

The professor pipes up like he's half asleep. "You know, Miss La-Tour, there must be a destiny about all this . . ."

"La de day—yeah, that's what that there Aphrodite told my new boy friend;" she throws a dazzlin' smile at him over her shoulder, wavin' that white robe around her flawless body.

"It won't seem the same on Venus without you," the professor sort of moans.

"Shut up, professor," Luigi hollers, then that tough voice of his breaks, like he was almost cryin'. "Baby, stop dancin' around."

"Outa my way, ya lug. I'm workin' up to the finale."

"Please, baby. I'll—I'll give ya a million asteroids, honey. I won't smoke no more of them there Saturn Stogies—"

The LaTour's movin' around gets more fancy all the time. She is all the moonbeams and flowers I ever seen, rolled into one. It was easy to unnerstan' how she got to be the big star that she was — even here on rough and ready Venus. She had class, and somethin' else—somethin' that made ya keep watchin' her every movement, like you was hungry for somethin', but ya didn't know

what. And you wanted to jump up and down, and holler, but ya just couldn't move because you was watchin' so hard.

She was wigglin' them beautiful, dimpled, rounded hips—

And then she wasn't there anymore.

"HEY!" Luigi runs around the room like he is goin' space-daffy.

"It's no use, Luigi," the little guy says, lookin' sadder than ever. "She's gone back. And this time I suspect it's forever," the prof says.

Luigi comes over to the little guy and grabs him by the throat.

"She can't do that to me. Gone back where? Y'gotta tell me."

"She's gone back to Paris," the prof says.

Luigi snarls like he is gettin' a Martian sand-fever fit. "What? Leavin' me fer some Frenchman? I'll—"

"No." The professor pulls away from Luigi. "This Paris is a part of ancient Greece—a young shepherd prince whose theft of the wife of Menelaos started the Trojan War."

"Huh?" Luigi is as up in the air as I am.

"Helen . . ." The little fella looks sort of thoughtful. "Of course. That was her name. Hel-

en of Troy—LaTour. The queen of space. 'The face that launched a thousand ships.'"

The professor nods at us. "Who would have ever believed—"

"Okay, pop," Luigi looks tough again, and I am plenty scared.

"Hey Luigi," I hollers, "You kin see the little guy is tellin' the truth. He didn't do nothin'—"

Luigi turns around, and I kin see the little red specks at the corners of his eyes. "Who says he did?" he snarls. He heads fer the open window, reachin' in his vest fer his blood-freezer, and I kin hear him mutterin'.

"I'm goin' after that guy Paris, and when I find him, I'm gonna turn the blaster on and smash him right through that there space warp!

"Yeah," he hollers, standin' there framed by that window fer a minute before he jets off, with all them millions of stars blazin' like fury in the cleared-up Venuvian night sky.

"No lousy Greek is gonna steal my girl and get away with it!"

I dunno. I ain't seen Luigi since, but I'm willin' t'wager a platterful of Plutonian Stingers that he ain't never gonna master that there hip-wiggle.

Not like Helen LaTour, he ain't.

THE END

Einstein's New Theory

EVER since the Einsteinian special and general Theories of Relativity appeared, with their enormous influence on all scientific thinking, the master theoretical physicist has been trying to build up a "unified field theory." This name means simply a unification of electric, magnetic and gravitational fields. The first two are connected—but the latter is the tough one.

Recently Einstein issued his unified field theory, but it made almost no splash in the scientific world. Most mathematicians and physicists feel that Einstein is mis-

taken. Their attitude is simply that there isn't enough data to connect gravitation with electricity and magnetism—yet!

It is felt that out of the tremendous amount of work being done on atomic and nuclear physics, some new facts are going to come, facts which will definitely link that mysterious force gravitation with familiar electro-magnetic wave theory. In science there are no absolutes; Einstein produced an Earth-shaking series of ideas a few decades ago, but his latest effort, while sound in approach, might be fundamentally wrong.







They were two very ordinary strawmen on adjacent farms. Nice playmates for a couple of imaginative kids. Then Jimmy gave a knife to—

The Dangerous Scarecrow

By

Carl Jacobi

BOOTH Mr. Maudsley and Mr. Trask were resplendent that October evening. Mr. Maudsley stood deep in the cornfield, overall trousers ballooning in the

wind, one hand nailed to a pie-tin that caught the moonlight and reflected it like a mirror. While across the road the hat of Mr. Trask was bright with the strip of

foil Jimmy had fastened to it that morning.

From the rear seat of the car Jimmy looked down upon the two figures as the road wound between the shocked fields:

Next to him his sister, Stella, said, "Mr. Trask looks fine tonight. I think he likes the silver ribbon you gave him."

Jimmy nodded. "Mr. Maudsley looks good too. See the way his hand shines?"

In the driver's seat as he twisted the wheel to avoid a rut in the road, grey-haired Mr. Tapping coughed and glanced at his wife.

"What are those kids whispering about?"

The whispers died abruptly, and the car rattled over Goose Creek bridge and began the long climb to the Tapping farm.

They stopped at the roadside mailbox, but there was no mail; then they were rolling up the cedar-lined lane, past the silo, past the barn, into the farmyard.

Stella went into the house with her mother, but Jimmy remained with his father to open the garage doors. He snapped the big padlock shut after the car was put away, made a vain attempt to catch Higgins, the cat, and followed Mr. Tapping up the porch steps into the house. Upstairs in his room half an hour later, he undressed reluct-

antly and climbed into bed, wide awake. He lay there listening to the old house creak and groan in the night wind.

From the distance came the mournful wail of a train whistle.

Presently Jimmy got out of bed, crossed to the window and stood looking out into the moonlight. Below him he could see his ball bat leaning against a tree, looking strangely white against the shadows. Beyond was the outline of a mounted horseman, the pump, and beyond that the grey circular walls of the silo pointed upward like a castle tower. Something caught Jimmy's eye, made him look to the east. He looked again, then moved to the table and rummaged through the drawer until he found the silver spyglass his father had given him last Christmas. He carried the glass back to the window, pushed the window open and peered out.

In the bright moonlight he could see Mr. Maudsley clearly. And a little farther on he could see Mr. Trask. Two silent figures alone in the cornfields.

The boy lowered the glass, wiped the lens on his sleeve, and carefully focused again. A puzzled frown furrowed his face. Save for the flapping of his trousers in the wind, Mr. Maudsley stood motionless, as of course he should.

But Mr. Trask . . . A passing cloud slid over the moon, darkening the landscape. In the few seconds before it brought complete blackness Jimmy thought he saw Mr. Trask kick up his heels, leap high in the air and begin to dance a rigadoon over the shocked corn.

At breakfast next morning Jim my waited impatiently for his sister to come downstairs. He hoped she would get to the table before his father because with Papa present he couldn't talk, and he wanted to talk. When at last Stella took her chair, he stretched his foot under the table and kicked her slightly.

"I've got a secret," he whispered.
"Tell it to me," said Stella.

"It's a big secret."

"If you won't tell, I won't give you any of my Flinch candy."

Jimmy was silent a moment as he gave this thought. Then he leaned forward and whispered,

"Mr. Trask moved last night."

"He always moves," replied Stella, unimpressed.

"I mean really moved. Toward Mr. Maudsley."

Stella choked on her porridge and the spoon all but slipped from her hand. She stared with wide open eyes. "He didn't."

Their whispers broke off as Mr. Tapping strode across the kitchen

and took his place at the head of the table. A heavy-set unimaginative man who seldom entered into conversation with the children, he eyed them speculatively. But he said nothing and began to eat his eggs and thick strips of bacon. He ate slowly and methodically, keeping his eyes to the table. When he had finished his coffee, he settled back to light his pipe. He passed the match back and forth across the bowl with quiet deliberation.

"Who's Mr. Maudsley and who's Mr. Trask?"

His wife smiled. "Those are just the names the children have given the scarecrows."

"What scarecrows?"

"The one in our field and the one on Edmund's land."

Mr. Tapping considered this while strong curls of strong tobacco smoke rose about him.

"Why those names? Why not Brown and Smith?"

"Because those are their names," explained Stella patiently.

Mr. Tapping cogitated on the mysteries of the juvenile mind. Abruptly he remembered the section of pasture fence that needed repairing and got to his feet.

But it was nearly noon before he got around to fence fixing, and then he had but one wire stapled when he heard a "halloo" and, turning, saw old Jason Southby

hobbling across the field toward him.

Jimmy, who was holding the wire for his father, let go the pliers and joined Stella who was trying to capture a bumble bee in a fruit jar.

"Howdy," said old Jason, reaching the fence. "Got a couple of helpers, I see."

Mr. Tapping smiled and nodded his greeting.

"I came over to ask if you're goin' to post your property for no-huntin' this year."

"Don't think so," replied Mr. Tapping. "Aren't many grouse, and I don't expect there'll be many hunters."

"No," agreed old Jason, "the birds are dyin' out. It ain't like the old days."

Mr. Tapping nodded.

"Remember when Maudsley was here. Things was different then."

"Who did you say?" said Mr. Tapping.

"Maudsley," repeated old Jason. "He owned your farm twenty . . . thirty years ago."

Mr. Tapping shook his head. Maudsley, eh? Jimmy and Stella must have heard the name from one of the neighbors' children.

"Yep," continued old Jason. "Maudsley had this place, and Trask rented the strip across the road."

"So?"

"Quite a story about them two."

MR. TAPPING said nothing. There would be no hurrying old Jason; and no stopping him either. The man obviously had a tale to tell, and he was enjoying every moment of this prelude. He bit off a piece of plug tobacco, chewed a moment and spat.

"It was corn that started it," he said. "Maudsley was a great one to fool around with hybrids, and he worked out an early variety he called Maudsley Number two. That ain't bein' planted any more, but in those days it was well thought of.

"Then Trask moves into the farm across the road. Trask was from down south, from around New Orleans way, and he was fired up with all sorts of backwoods stuff. Pretty soon he began to fight with Maudsley about how good his hybrid corn was. Seems Trask believed the only way to grow good crops was by usin' voodoo spells. Got so them two couldn't come into sight of each other without startin' an argument. One day Trask got so mad he let his cattle loose in Maudsley's cornfield. That settled it. Maudsley headed for Trask's place, armed with a double-barreled shotgun. But before he got there, Trask made him-

self invisible."

"He did what?" demanded Mr. Tapping.

"Well anyway, that's the story Maudsley spread around. Funny thing is, folks believed him. He said Trask, bein' from New Orleans country, knew all sorts of voodoo spells, and he said that Trask, bein' afraid, had cast a spell over himself to make himself vanish. 'Course some persons were suspicious and the sheriff asked Maudsley some questions. But Maudsley proved his shotgun hadn't been fired, and no one had seen him commit any crime. Trask was never seen around these parts again. After that Maudsley got to actin' sorta queer: lookin' over his shoulder, talkin' to himself. Then one day he up and cleared out, and the next anything was heard of him he had moved south to New Orleans, the very place Trask had come from. Maudsley is still down there; he wouldn't come back even long enough to complete the sale of his farm." Jason's voice died off as he reached the end of his story.

"Did you hear what he said?" said Jimmy in a low voice.

"Sure." Stella rose triumphant from capturing her bumble bee. "I knew it all the time."

IT rained the next night and even with the spyglass Jimmy

could see nothing in the cornfields. But he knew the two scarecrows were out there, and he could imagine them standing in the rain with beads of water dripping from their hats. The muddy water would be running in rivulets between the rows of shocked corn and when the lightning flashed the shocks would gleam dully like so many stacked guns at an army encampment.

Next day after lunch Jimmy drew his sister aside.

"If you don't tell anybody I'll show you the present I've got for Mr. Maudsley. Promise?"

"I promise," said Stella.

Jimmy led the way into the barn and in the rear near one of the horse stalls, swept aside a covering of hay. He picked up a long rusty knife and displayed it with an air of pride. Stella was disappointed.

"Just an old knife."

"It's a voodoo knife, that's what it is. See the way the handle is carved."

Stella looked and saw a yellowed handle of what once might have been ivory, carved in the shape of a running goat with several quasi-human faces low down near the hilt.

"What are you going to do with it?" she said.

"I told you. Give it to Mr.

Maudsley. It's his."

"How do you know it's his?"

"This is Mr. Maudsley's barn, isn't it? Besides, it was near his other stuff."

Stella was not enthusiastic. "Papa won't like it. He got mad when you nailed that pie-tin to Mr. Maudsley's hand."

"Papa won't know a thing about it. Come on."

It was hot in the cornfield. The morning sun beat down fiercely and the air smelled of damp earth. The ground between the rows of stubble was marked with tiny channels the running water had cut the night before. But the shocks were dry again and in the slight breeze they whispered and rustled gently. The two children made a bee-line for the center of the field until they came to the two cross boards that served as a framework for the scarecrow.

The scarecrow was fashioned of some old clothing which had once belonged to a fat man—overalls, a coat of what might have been a Sunday suit at one time, and an ancient felt hat—castaways which the children had found in the barn. The cardboard face, marked in black crayon, a little blurred now from the rain, had been copied by Jimmy from an old photograph the boy had come upon among some old papers when he had cleaned

out the attic. Jimmy had decided that even a crow wouldn't be fooled by a faceless scarecrow.

Jimmy was about to climb the upright shaft when Stella stopped him.

"Wait," she said. "Let's not give Mr. Maudsley the knife."

"Why not? It's his."

"Let's give it to Mr. Trask."

The boy's jaw dropped as the enormity of the idea grew upon him. Then he uttered a squeal of delight.

Laughing and giggling, the two children turned and ran down and vaulted the fence that enclosed the aisle of shocks to the road and adjacent field.

Five minutes later the second scarecrow brandished a knife at the end of one of its handless sleeves.

But as Jimmy came out on the road again, he looked across at Mr. Maudsley. In full view in the sunlight, it wasn't a cardboard face now; it was a round full face, with great folds of fat, and it was twisted in an expression of stark fear.

FOR three nights the skies over the Tapping farm were black, and a cold wind huffing down from the north kept the children indoors where they played endless games of parchesi. On the fourth night the moon broke through the clouds.

Jimmy, squatting by the window, the spyglass to his eye, stared out at the two scarecrows. At intervals he thought he saw Mr. Trask descend from the mounting pole, leap up over the shocks and begin his strange dance. But at the instant those capers began, the clouds always managed to blot out the light, and the boy never could be sure if it was a trick of his eye or the glass.

And then Jimmy observed two things. With him in his gyrations Mr. Trask carried the knife, and as he darted back and forth, he edged almost imperceptibly toward Mr. Maudsley.

The boy watched a long time to confirm his fears. Then he turned and ran to his sister's room.

"Mr. Trask is getting closer," he said. "You'd better come see."

At the window Stella spent several moments focusing the glass. Slowly her body went rigid, and she uttered a hoarse exclamation.

"He's going to kill Mr. Maudsley."

The boy nodded, his eyes shining with terror.

"We've got to try and stop him!"

She turned and ran down the stairs and through the lower floor rooms to the back door. Jimmy ran after her. Crossing the yard, they sped halfway down the lane,

then pushed through the cedar windbreak and veered toward the cornfield. Pumpkins, golden in the moonlight, rose up on either side as they raced up the incline.

Suddenly Stella drew up short. "Look!"

Mr. Trask had crossed the road and now was coming full tilt through the row of shocks. Jimmy, arms spread wide, threw himself forward to block the onrushing figure's path. He had a brief impression of a blurred shadow bowling toward him and passing through him while he struck out with his small fists ineffectually. Behind there was a ripping of cloth and a hoarse scream.

Stella came running to where Jimmy stood. Together they saw two shadows locked in an incredible embrace. Like a scythe raised aloft, Mr. Trask's knife swept downward in a wide arc and with a quick stroke cut off Mr. Maudsley's head. Mr. Maudsley's hat flew up, Mr. Maudsley's head rolled off, and a thin cry of triumph welled up and faded.

And then there was nothing, except that Mr. Trask was back on one side of the fence, and Mr. Maudsley was on the other, minus his head, of course.

"Gee!" said Stella.

"Golly!" said Jimmy. He ran over to pick up Mr. Maudsley's

hat; Jimmy tried to put Mr. Maudsley's head back but somehow it wouldn't stick.

"We'll fix it in the morning," said Jimmy.

At the edge of the field Jimmy paused and caught his sister's arm anxiously. "You won't tell, Stella?"

"No of course not."

"Cross your heart . . . ?"

"Cross my heart and hope to die."

IT was night of the next day and the children sat playing parchesi. Mrs. Tapping was knitting. Mr. Tapping, settled back in the platform rocker, was reading the newspaper aloud, as was his custom. Outside, Mr. Trask was in one

field, and Mr. Maudsley was in the other; his head was back in place, but only tied on—it was not the same; it looked very dead, even though Jimmy and Stella had done their best.

"Any news?" asked Mrs. Tapping.

"Same old stuff. New taxes, one of them foreign countries talkin' big and threatenin' war," said Mr. Tapping. "One thing here, though—they found a fellow with his head cut off right in the middle of a city street."

"My land! Not here in Akers-town?"

Mr. Tapping laughed. "Lord, no! Happened way down in New Orleans."

The End

INTRODUCING the AUTHOR

★ *Carl Jacobi* ★

(Continued from Page 2)

and I went back to the campus to write publicity for an office known as the Key Center of War Information.

For a time I deserted science fiction and fantasy to dabble in radio script writing and—based on some first hand information—to write adventure stories with an Indonesia-Malaysia locale. In all, some fifty

different magazines have carried my short stories and novelettes, including translations into French, Swedish and Danish and publications in England and New Zealand, yet I am always surprised when an editor says yes. I never did get around to finishing that novel, but in 1949 Arkham House published my book, *Revelations in Black*, a collection of

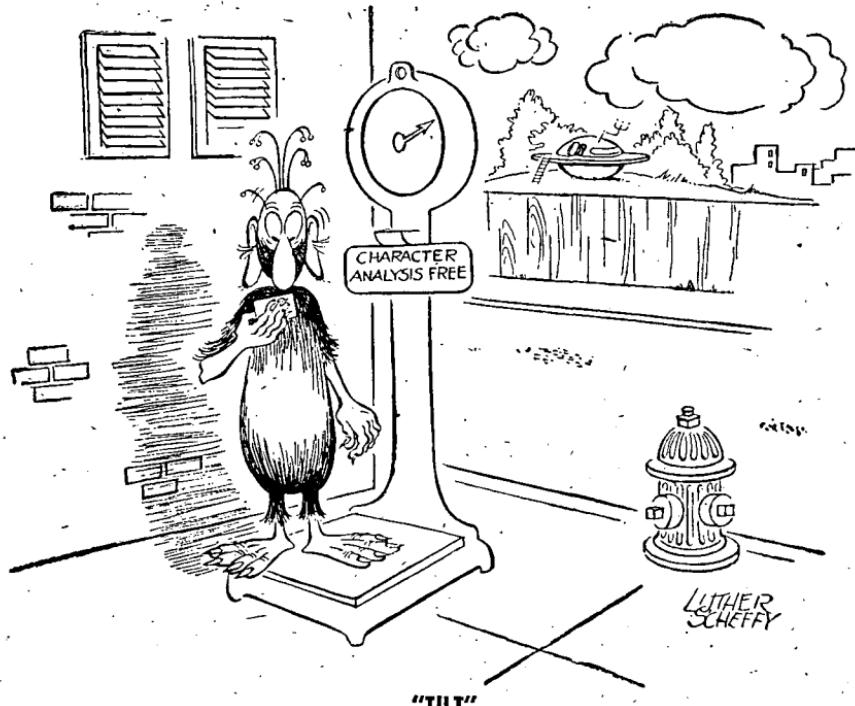
twenty-one fantasy stories, and magazine stories have crept into a dozen or more anthologies since then.

My hobby is my cabin at Red Cedar Point, Lake Minnewashta, which I built as a studio but which demanded so much physical attention the original idea has become ensnared with paint brushes, lawn mowers (a heinous device) hammers and saws. I like trees and when a friend offered to give me some honey locust seedlings I ac-

cepted gratefully, quite unaware of the fiendish gleam in his eye. The fecundity of those trees is amazing; today the place is fast rivaling the jungles of Bataan.

The Dangerous Scarecrow grew out of a double example of fast-disappearang Americana which I sighted from a southern Minnesota road—two scarecrows facing each other across adjacent fields, remarkably well clothed!

—Carl Jacobi



DANGER IN THE VOID

by

Charles E. Fritch

Silvia secretly planned to divorce George when they reached Arcturus. But a space journey can alter a careful plan — or hatch a worse one!

THE trouble started when the *Arcturus Queen* was four billion miles out of Earth, heading for the star after which it was named: It pulled clear of the solar system, using conventional drive, then switched into subspace. A few minutes later the ship shuddered perceptibly, and an authoritative voice came reassuringly from the public address system.

"Passengers will please remain in their seats. We are temporarily cutting the subspace drive due to mechanical difficulties which have developed. There is no cause for alarm."

The message was repeated and George said, "What do you suppose is the matter?"

"How should I know," Silvia snapped. "I'm not a space mechanic. Why don't you find out if you're so interested?"

He glared at her. "I was just wondering. You don't have to get so disagreeable. But then, why should now be any different?"

She smiled at that, though her blood raced and her fingers itched to make red ribbons of his face. "I've got plenty of reason to be disagreeable—"

"Okay, okay," he said; "let's not go through that again." He got up. "I'm going up to the observation platform." And he went down the aisle between the rows of seats and disappeared through a door at the farthest end.

She glared after him. That was always his way, running out on an argument. Well, when this trip was over, there would be no more running away.

A man dropped into the seat beside her.

"This seat's taken," she said



automatically, and then realized the man must have known, since all seats were reserved.

"I know," the man said. "I'd like to talk to you."

She studied him for a moment. He had a rather common face, one with no particularly outstanding features, a face that would be difficult to remember, she thought. He wore a plain business suit, with a conventional white shirt and an unobtrusive tie. He did not appear the wolfish type to her, but rather the ordinary businessman you might see hanging onto helibus straps anywhere on Earth.

"You want to talk to me?" she said carefully. "About what?"

"Your divorce," the man said simply.

"My divorce? But—" She stopped. She was about to say, "But how did you know?" when it suddenly occurred to her that George might have hired this man to find out if she were planning one of those rapid Arcturan separations. She hadn't thought to wonder if he suspected she was planning one. If he knew about her divorce plans, he might take counter measures just for spite; with Arcturan divorce regulations as they were, that would be bad.

She said, "I'm not divorced, Mr. . . ."

"Jones," the man supplied, smil-

ing. "I know that, Mrs. Bennet, but I also know that you're going to Arcturus to obtain one. I'd like to talk to you about that, confidentially of course."

SHE was certain of it now. He knew her name and spoke about a divorce no one but she knew of. "I'm sorry," she said coldly, turning her head away to indicate that as far as she was concerned the interview was at an end, "I gave no one to understand that. I'm accompanying my husband on a business trip. Now, if you'll please —"

"Nevertheless," the man insisted, "your intentions are plain, perhaps not to others or even your husband —but to us, very clear. Let me be frank, Mrs. Bennet. I represent an organization which can be of great benefit to you, providing you help us by accepting our standard plan."

"Your organization?" she questioned.

The man waved a vague hand. "The organization is of necessity nameless. However, it is quite effective. In fact, the only way you've heard of us, without realizing it, is through the effects we produce for our clients."

"What sort of—effects?"

"I promised to be frank, Mrs. Bennet. I shall. Your husband is an android, and you hate him for that reason and for others."

Silvia gasped. "How did you know? That he's an android, I mean?"

The man smiled. "Our organization has access to a great deal of information; it's an integral part of our business, this information, serving as a springboard for contacting prospective clients like you."

"You mean," she said testily, "you'd like to help me get a divorce?" She smiled, adding, "For a fee, naturally."

The man shook his head no. "Something more permanent. We'd like to make a widow of you."

For a moment Silvia sat paralyzed, thinking she had not heard right. After awhile, she said, "You'd like to what?"

"You were carefully studied," the man went on, "and we know the idea of your husband's death is not repugnant to you; that's why I'm suggesting the idea simply, without any cat-and-mouse tactics. Your husband has insurance amounting to slightly less than one hundred thousand credits; our fee will be one-tenth of that plus one-tenth of any other monies which may accrue as a result of his death."

Silvia sat in shocked silence, not knowing what to say. "You're crazy," she managed finally. "I'll call the officers—"

"Who wouldn't believe you because the story is fantastic," the

man pointed out, certain of himself. "Only our clients and potential clients know we are in existence, for not one of our—er—operations has been discovered. Think it over, Mrs. Bennet. Even though Arcturan divorces can be quick, they aren't always painless. It's like war with them, just as everything is, and wars can be lost. Our way is more certain; you're assured of your husband's estate and nine-tenths of all insurance money. I'll be around when you change your mind."

He got up and walked down the aisle in back of her. Silvia didn't look to follow him. She was thinking, *when I change my mind; the man was that sure of it, was he? Or was that just to put her in a positive frame of mind, making her think it was not a question of yes or no, but when.* She had quarrels with George, sure, and sometimes she even felt she hated him—but the idea of murder had not entered her mind. Mentally she added, *at least until now!* She shook her head—no, it was out of the question.

SHE had to admit to herself, though, now that she *was* thinking of it, that she would miss the easy living being married to George entailed, even with any alimony she might receive. He was the android version of the old Horatio

Alger story, though very few persons knew or even suspected George was not human. The World Congress had passed equalizing laws for androids just as they had for the various races, with the difference that it worked for androids since they had no outward mark of being different from the select group.

While not wealthy, they had lived well, with George trying in his simple fashion to please her. She thought once she had loved him, for after all he was a rather likable person. He had told her of his being a non-human and had proposed in almost the same breath, and it had shocked her at first the way any normal woman would be shocked at being told such a thing. But George was on his way to becoming somebody in the business world, and after going mentally over the pros and cons of the thing she had decided she could do much worse. There were times during the two years of marriage, however, when she wasn't even certain of that.

She had considered the possibility of forcing him after the divorce to give her some of his real estate or investments in return for not disclosing his secret; for while technically there was supposed to be no ill will toward androids there was an instinctive repulsion on the part of many humans for someone who was not of their kind, and

George's business contacts would inevitably suffer if the knowledge got out. It was not blackmail, she rationalized—she disliked the unlawful sound of the word—but a business deal in which she supplied silence in return for his money. It was the least he could do she thought, after taking up two years of her life.

But murder was another thing, a totally different thing that had entered her mind only briefly during arguments and then not seriously. Even blackmail would be lily-white compared to it. She had never actually entertained the idea for any length of time, but now she considered it—not seriously even now, she told herself hastily, but merely as an intellectual diversion.

Android or not, as far as the courts were concerned, it was murder just as though the victim were a human. But the case might never reach the courts, for the "organization" would handle all homicidal details, she remembered, and they were probably professionals in the art. Strange, no one had discovered the organization, but that probably testified to its ability. They could probably kill someone, even George, and no one would ever know...

She shook her head in mild disdain, wondering at the sudden flood of criminal thoughts started by the stranger. She reminded herself that

she was going to Arcturus to divorce her husband, not to kill him. She wondered disinterestedly if he were sulking up there on the observation platform.

The loudspeaker crackled and a feminine voice said, "The mechanical difficulties have been located and are being repaired. It will be approximately thirty minutes, Earth rating, before we enter subspace again. Meanwhile, the lounge is open for those wishing to patronize it. May we suggest a cocktail, followed by a dinner from any of the planets of any system. The view from the observation platform —"

The voice droned on, telling of the swimming pool, the three-dimensional (off-gravity) tennis rooms, and other diversions designed to get passengers' minds off the fact that they were temporarily stalled in open space.

GEORGE appeared in the doorway at one end of the aisle and walked toward her. She gave a small gasp as she saw the stranger come through the doorway behind him. They came down the aisle, and George dropped into his seat. The stranger looked questioningly at her before he passed. She shook her head no.

"There's a good view from the observation platform," George said,

as though making an effort to be conversational. "Now's the time to see it, when the ship's in normal space. They've got a large transparent dome, like half a bubble, and when you look up it seems as though you're out there in space, floating."

"Really?" she said drily. "I'm not exactly a tourist, you know. I *have* been on observation platforms before."

For a moment he looked at her as though wondering if there were anything he could say that wouldn't bring out a disagreeable word. "Silvia, I wish—" he began.

"All right, all right," she interrupted wearily. "If there's anything I've said to injure your poor sensitive feelings, I apologize. But please don't give me that lost sheep-dog look; I can't stand it."

He started to say something, then changed his mind at the futility of it and fell silent. She regarded him from the corner of her vision for a moment, feeling strangely sympathetic toward him. It made her feel something of a heel when he fell silently accusing like that, and she didn't like the feeling. If only he'd rant and rave at her, stand on his own two feet and maybe even beat her once in a while. She wouldn't like that, but at least it would be better than this outwardly placid pacifism. She

suspected his attitude stemmed from an inferior complex due to his being android; he could spin the world on its tail, corner all the credits in the solar system, but still he could not escape the fact of his artificial birth. That fact was her weapon, and he knew it and was afraid of it.

After awhile, he said slowly, "I'm going to get a divorce, Silvia."

She looked at him swiftly, her eyes taking in each facet of his features to see if he were jesting. She even wondered for a moment if she had heard correctly.

"I'm going to get a divorce on Arcturus," he repeated, not looking at her. "I've been thinking it over for the past several months. Finally, I decided it would be the best thing for both of us. I hope you won't contest it; I don't think I'd like one of those running battles."

Silvia sat stunned by the revelation. This was to have been her surprise party, not his, for under Arcturan divorce regulations the member initiating the action had the distinct advantage, especially when the other was unprepared; the war-conditioned star-system had developed this marital blitzkrieg to satisfy the sporting instincts of its people and to attract the curiosity-seeking Earth trade. She had figured it as a surprise to him, know-

ing he would be shocked by its suddenness and take no action against her demands for what would normally constitute an excessive amount of alimony.

"I thought I'd better tell you," he said, almost apologetically, "even if it does work to my disadvantage." He got up. "If you'd care to discuss it further, I'll be in the bar."

In shocked silence, Silvia watched her husband retreat down the aisle. It was so typical of him to tell her, but the thought of him doing something like this at all was incredible. More than that, it was unbearable. She felt anger surge within her to realize that she'd been beaten to the punch, even if the romantic fool had confessed his intentions. Slowly, she could sense her plans wavering, becoming insecure, and panic gripped her. She'd had it all planned, all of it, working out the details with secret enthusiasm, never suspecting George was discontented enough to take action himself.

SHE still had a good chance, of course, but not nearly as good a one as before. The two years she had been married to him would be an eternity compared to what compensation she might receive now, if she received anything at all. Perhaps she could make up to him be-

fore they got to Arcturus, convince him she was repentent, that she wanted him to remain with her. The thought of kowtowing before him, putting her pride on the auction block, sickened her, though. Besides, he would easily see through the subterfuge; though weak, he was not a fool. Inwardly, she cursed, her mind a frantic jumble of thoughts. There was nothing she could do, nothing except hope for the best. Unless—

The stranger appeared with the thought concerning him. He dropped into the seat beside her.

"Have you reconsidered?" he asked her quietly.

It was murder, she knew, and yet George was only an android, something that was manufactured artificially in a laboratory in great liquid-filled tanks; that somehow made it different, made it something like putting a machine out of commission rather than destroying a life.

She wet her lips. "In the eyes of the law," she said, "it's murder, you know."

"All the laws in the universe," the man returned gravely, "will not make an android human, Mrs. Bennet. There is a faction which gives our organization a bonus each time an android is destroyed, so you can see you're not alone in this."

She didn't look at him. "How would you do it?"

"Efficiently," he replied vaguely, "in a way I cannot yet disclose. Satisfaction, however, is guaranteed."

"Ten percent of the insurance money is the total fee?"

"Ten percent of *all* insurance monies," he corrected, "which is not necessarily the same thing." He drew a paper from his coat, opened it and handed her a pen.

"I have to sign something?" she asked. "But won't that incriminate me?"

"You promise to pay the ten percent *in consideration of services rendered*," the man explained. "The services are, of course, not stated."

She took the pen and signed before she could talk herself out of it.

"When will it be?"

Carefully, he folded the document and returned it to his coat. "Before we reach Arcturus," the man said, getting up. "Thank you very much, Mrs. Bennet. Glad to be of service to you." And he walked away.

SHE nodded vaguely and then began considering what she had done. George was an android, she told herself again, only an android. But how could you tell an android from a human? Certainly not outwardly. Blood chemistry was different, but the blood was red just the same. The skin was a different

composition, yet it felt and looked like human skin. The personality and the character had human flaws in them. What, then, was the difference? The answer came: an android was not human because he was an android, which by definition was not human.

This reasoning tended to confuse her, and she tried to push the thoughts from her mind. It was done, and that was all that mattered, she told herself. Pangs of conscience might plague her now, but afterward the soothing balm of money would ease the pain. They'd never gotten along, so what difference did it make.

She forced her thoughts away from that and wondered how they'd do it. She hoped suddenly that it wouldn't be violent, and then she recalled that a double indemnity clause would give her twice the hundred thousand — less the ten percent, of course, for services rendered. At least, she hoped he wouldn't suffer. He'd suffered enough during his lifetime, just for being an android.

It must have been horrible, she thought, having to go through life knowing you're less than human, or at least in having people think that. Even if humans accepted you as an equal (which they didn't, despite any laws), you'd have to live with the knowledge that you evolved

from an artificially produced embryo under conditions simulating normal birth. Artificial growth, she thought disgustedly, like the hydroponic production of vegetables. She felt a sudden sorrow for him, a sympathy that was as far from pity as it had ever been. Perhaps it was even for his own good, she tried to rationalize, to do this. And yet she was still not certain.

George came down the aisle toward her, and she looked away hastily. She felt the seat depress beside her.

"The sub-space drive will be ready in a few minutes more," he said. "Then we'll really be on our way to Arcturus."

"Yes," she said quietly, not looking at him. She wanted to say something sarcastic, something to make him squirm, something that would give an aura of normality to her actions. Yet the words stuck in her throat, refusing to come. He has only a few moments, she told herself, let them be pleasant.

She was surprised that the thought put her in a bad light, almost admitting that it was her fault that they didn't get along; yet it was difficult to be patient with someone who always seemed to be thinking grave thoughts, as though constantly reminding himself he was an inferior.

But there was a time, she remembered, when he had not been grave. When they had first met, for example, and during the courtship that had followed. A smile touched her lips as she thought about the little things, the picnics and the sudden drenching rainstorms that inevitably came after the ants were finished with their food, the 'copter trips over the scenic wonderlands of Earth, the first accidental brushings of their hands that had led to a kiss and then to another. But that was before she had known he was an android.

She felt suddenly ashamed that the word "android" could mean so much.

"George?" She reached out and touched his hand. It felt warm and human.

He turned, bewilderment in those android human-looking eyes. He smiled at her, rather nervously, she thought. "Yes?"

"Nothing," she said, "nothing at all." She drew her hand away and stared straight ahead.

It was wrong, she thought suddenly, it was the wrongest thing she had ever done in her life. She knew that with sudden clarity. All the money in the universe would not be worth the life of this—this *human* beside her. Yes, that was it, android or not, he was as human as anyone she had ever known.

THE loudspeaker hummed briefly and a voice said, "In thirty seconds we will enter subspace. All passengers will remain seated until the changeover is complete."

The voice repeated the message, and Silvia thought frantically, *we'll be on our way to Arcturus and somewhere along the line the stranger will kill George!*

She leaped up.

"Sit down," George cried, pushing at her. "We're going into subspace."

"I've got to see somebody," she said, struggling.

"It can wait," George insisted.

She went limp, as she heard the whine of the motors deep down within the spaceship. "Yes," she said, "yes, I suppose it will." But not too long. She didn't know when, or even how, but each moment might be George's last.

She braced herself involuntarily, as the whine rose to the threshold of inaudibility. A sudden rumbling came. The spaceship shook, the walls twisting as though grasped by a giant's hand. The room tilted precariously. A woman screamed.

"Something's gone w r o n g," George shouted. He grabbed Silvia's hand.

"Attention all passengers," a frantic voice came from the loudspeaker, "prepare to abandon ship. Put on emergency spacesuits and go

to lifecraft assigned you. There is no immediate cause for alarm. There is time enough for all to reach safety, if instructions are obeyed. Above all, remain calm. Calls for help are going out—”

Silvia was dimly aware that George had pulled her spacesuit from the overhead locker and was trying to stuff her into it. Thank goodness, she thought, it was like a miracle this happening. Now, neither of them would go to Arcturus and the stranger's plans would be delayed until she had time to cancel them.

“I'm okay,” she insisted, fumbling with the rest of her suit. “Put yours on.”

“We're going to be killed!” a man shouted near them. He scrambled down the aisle toward the exit. George hit him, and the man staggered, looking like a small boy punished for breaking a window. Then he began sobbing and someone led him away.

The ship shuddered again, and the walls protested with the grating of metal. Silvia staggered, but her husband's arm shot out to steady her.

A voice from the loudspeaker said, “Attention, all passengers. Prepare to abandon ship. The following persons will proceed to emergency exit one. Please be orderly. There is enough time and

enough room.” He read off a list of six names.

“I hope we're together,” George said. “I—I've changed my mind about something.”

Silvia felt a surge of pleasure. He wasn't going to get the divorce after all. She didn't stop to analyze her feeling, but she hoped it wasn't selfish.

“The following passengers,” the loudspeaker announced, “will go to emergency exit two.”

George listened carefully and at their names said, “That's us.” He took her by the arm. “Better put your helmet in place. There might be a leak.”

She nodded, flipping it over her head the way he did, placing the faceplate open so she could talk without using the radio. The way he seemed concerned over her made her feel ashamed she had plotted his death, and yet at the same time it made her feel glad that they had come to some silent understanding in time.

HE led the way down the aisle and into the corridor that led to exit two. They passed into the lifecraft, a miniature spaceship, and sat down to wait. There were four others, three men and one woman. The pilot came in last, helmet off, and sat at the controls.

“We're leaving the ship now,”

he warned, and pressed several studs.

Silvia stared at the pilot. "George," she said, gripping her husband's arm. The pilot was the stranger who was going to kill George!

"We'll be all right," George assured her.

The small lifecraft trembled as its rockets blasted them with sudden acceleration into space. In seconds they were many miles beyond the *Arcturus Queen*.

The woman was pale and frightened. One of the men stared through a porthole. "Look at it back there," he exclaimed. "It looks like it's going to—"

"Attention all lifecraft pilots," a loudspeaker said. "Rendezvous at a point within one thousand yards of lifecraft number one. Distress signals have been sent to the outer planets of Sol and help will arrive shortly. Follow this beam." The message was repeated and then replaced by a humming sound.

The pilot switched off the sound. George said, "Hadn't you—" and then he stopped.

The pilot got up from his seat. There was a gun in his hand. "The signal won't be necessary," he said calmly. "None of you aboard this ship will be rescued."

Silvia bit her lip, hesitating. Then she said, "I've changed my mind,

the deal's off."

The man smiled. "A contract is a contract, Mrs. Bennet," he said. "Besides, we've gone too far now with plans to turn back."

George was staring at her in disbelief. "Silvia, you mean that you—"

"I'll explain later," she told him.

"The time for explanations," the man said, "is right now. There will be no 'later' for any of you. What your wife means, Mr. Bennet, is just what you suspect. And what your husband is trying to say, Mrs. Bennet, is that *he* arranged a similar contract with me as did these other people."

Silvia felt a chill pass through her at the words. George, she thought, George was planning to—

"I was desperate," George cried, beside her, his eyes pleading. "I was afraid that once we got a divorce you'd tell them about me. But I couldn't go through with it, Silvia; that's what I meant when I said I'd changed my mind."

She listened numbly.

"An interesting situation," the man smiled, "but it's much too late for anybody to change his mind. At your deaths, the organization will collect ten percent of your insurance benefits, plus the insurance covering passengers killed as a result of a spaceship explosion."

"Spaceship explosion," one of the

male passengers said, coming out of a lethargy, "but there's been no—"

"Look," another cried, pointing to a porthole.

They looked, and the *Arcturus Queen* burst into flame, erupting with a great soundless explosion that sent metal splinters flying in all directions.

The man smiled again, a smile of satisfaction, of knowing his plans were ripening. "The *Arcturus Queen* was insured by the owner, who needed money. We take ten percent from him, a nominal fee considering the risk involved."

"And what of us?" one of the men passengers demanded.

The man shrugged. "Each of you is married to someone who prefers your insurance money to your companionship. Not a very satisfying thought, is it?"

The woman began to cry softly.

"You'll never get away with this," another of the men said, fists clenching.

"Can you think of any reason why not?" the man said, fondling the weapon in his hand.

I can, Silvia thought; George and I aren't getting caught in our own traps if I can help it. If I can only tilt the ship, get him off balance—

Slowly, she edged toward the control panel, signaling George

with a careful nod of her head. George caught the signal, and she could see him tense.

"We're wasting time," the man said, a trifle impatiently. He readied the gun. "If there are no last questions—"

Silvia made a sudden thrust for the control panel.

TH E man whirled, cursing, and brought the gun to bear on her. But George was on him, gripping the man by the throat. The gun went off, and a searing blast of flame filled the lifecraft.

"The wall!" someone cried.

Silvia looked up. The wall of the lifecraft hung suspended for a moment like some great jigsaw puzzle where the gun's blast had struck it. And then it fell apart, blowing outward with the hurricane of the cabin's air leaping into space.

Instinctively, Silvia slammed shut the glass on her faceplate and tried to grab some solid support. But a giant hand lifted her from the floor and whisked her out into the blackness of the void. Weightlessness came with terrifying suddenness, and at first it was like falling through black silent endless waters. She tried to scream, but the sound refused to come out.

She called George's name several times and then remembered the radio and turned the activating

knob. "George," she said. "I'm outside the lifecraft. Can you see me?"

No answer came. Space was a velvet black out here, the stars gleaming points. She had no sensation of movement, but twisting her head in the helmet, she could see the lifecraft becoming smaller. Her heart sank with the knowledge that inertia was pulling her out, out farther and farther into space.

He's not coming after me, she thought suddenly, and the thought terrified her, made her throat suddenly tight. *Even if he hears, he won't come.*

Around her, space drifted—dark, silent, limitless. Ahead, a great nebula glowed.

"I'm sorry," she said slowly to herself. "I suppose I deserve it."

"Probably," George's voice came in her helmet. "but I'm coming after you anyway. Everybody's okay on this end, except our insurance man who couldn't get his helmet on in time; it seems my hands were somehow in the way."

Her heart leaped at his voice. "Do you still love me, George?" she asked. Somehow, that mattered more than anything else.

"I don't know," he said wearily, "I don't really know."

"Can't we try again?" she pleaded.

"I'm sick of trying," George said.

Her heart sank. She drifted through space watching the lifecraft bear down upon her. In a few seconds it would be close enough, so that the braking rockets—

"George!" she cried. "You're coming too close. I'll be burned by the braking rockets!"

"Accidents happen," George told her.

She screamed.

The lifecraft turned aside then, and long fingers of flame shot past her from the forward tubes. The ship drifted alongside her then, and all jets were cut.

She breathed sudden relief. "Thank goodness. For a few seconds there . . ."

"It was a bad few seconds for both of us," George told her. "Don't tempt me again, Silvia."

He appeared at the gaping hole in the lifecraft, a rope in his hands.

"I won't, George," she promised. "We'll try again; this time we'll *really* try."

He tossed her the rope. She grabbed it and began the descent to the ship. When he pulled her inside it was like being born again.

And somehow, she knew this new life would be different.

THE END



Mutation had changed men into supermen—
yet women were not affected. Estella resented
this because it meant she would virtually be a
slave to Varn. But then she suddenly learned—

SUPERMEN NEED SUPERWIVES!

by

Louis G. Daniels



ESTELLA suddenly realized the tall brunet was in the observation ring staring down at the pre-marriage girls for the fourth consecutive afternoon. Instinctively she knew the dreaded day had come.

That he had been studying her, of all the sun bathers who mottled the deep-green lawn during each recreation period, she had no doubt.

His stare was like something solid—something which she could

almost feel pressing close against her skin.

Lera, lying close to her, turned over. "He's up there again?" she asked.

Estella nodded, trying not to show her fear.

"Has the superintendent said anything yet?"

"No. But I imagine she'll call me soon."

Lera was thoughtfully silent a moment. Then, "How do you feel

about it?"

There was no use trying to hide it. "I'm afraid. I don't want to get married. Resentment chased away some of the oppressing fear. "I wish," she said caustically, "that all men were—"

"Sh-h-h," Lera cautioned. "Don't forget, they have telescopic vision. They can project their hearing too. I'll bet right now it's just as though he were standing here, listening to everything we say."

Estella started, hazarded a quick glance at the man. He hadn't moved. His face was motionless, as though it were cast in metal.

They were like statues—all the men in the observation ring. Here to select their wives, they seemed rather to be occupied with the endless and inconceivable problems of government and science and economics and everything in the universe.

"He is handsome," Lera suggested.

As if *that* mattered, Estella thought. All men were alike. At least, they were so similar in every respect that they seemed to resemble one another physically too. They were almost like individuals of another species . . . All male robins looked alike. All drones seemed to be cast from the same mold. You could recognize the individual differences only if you

were one of them.

A stout woman in the stiff uniform of the dormitory's staff threaded her way through the mound-like expanse of sun bathers and stood towering over Estella.

"Superintendent Colea wants to see you," she announced solemnly.

Estella turned fearful eyes toward Lera, "Do you suppose—?"

"Why else would the superintendent call you?" the other girl interrupted, looking up suggestively at the man behind the shining glass of the ring.

SUPERINTENDENT Colea hardly more than glanced up over her desk as Estella hesitatingly entered the room.

"You have been selected," the superintendent said curtly, not looking up from the folder which was spread open before her. "You will be married on the sixteenth."

Estella tensed. "But—but who is he?" she demanded apprehensively.

Colea looked up sharply. "Does it make any difference? You were told in your indoctrination you will never have the occasion to use his name . . . Now, if you'll get your forms from the registrar, you can begin checking out."

With a bobbing pencil, she indicated the door on the left.

"But—but I don't want to get

married!" Estella was unable to hide the near frenzy that had become a constricting tension which she could no longer fight. "I'm afraid. I don't know what it's like outside!"

Colea rose, her columnar height commanding silence. "None of us knows what it's like outside. But that makes no difference."

"But I won't be happy—not like I am here. Maybe I'm not suited to him!"

"It is sufficient for you to know that he has studied all your physio-psychological charts and is satisfied that you will be compatible with him."

In an overpowering sense of utter futility, her control collapsed and Estella lowered her face into her hands, sobbing.

A soft palm laid itself on her shoulder. "Come child," said Colea, "it can't be that bad. You'll get used to it. You may even learn to—love him."

Estella looked up, her vision blurred through moist eyelashes. "Why is it like this? Why can't we come together on equal terms. It was that way once, wasn't it?"

Colea looked far away—much farther than the confines of the room. "Yes, child. But then came the great change."

"The mutation."

"Yes. A mutation that was link-

ed with the male sex gene. And now men are something we can't even understand . . . something much too preoccupied with intellectual pursuits to be encumbered with an—an idiotic wife."

Tears of despair clouded Estella's eyes again and she lowered her head..

Colea patted her on the back. "It won't be so bad, dear. After all isn't it natural for us to belong to a man—even if we can't understand him any more than the dogs in ancient history could understand their human masters?"

But a sudden surge of desperation seized Estella. "Tell him I won't go! Tell him there's something wrong with me!"

Colea stiffened and once more she was the severe superintendent. "You will get your checkout forms immediately."

The door opened and an excited subordinate in a white smock entered. "He's here. The one who's taking Estella is here!"

Estella shuddered.

"I AM Varn, the man said, his eyes not focused on anything in the room. And he seemed to struggle with the words as though he were using a language which he had only recently learned.

He closed his eyes and stood

rigid at the desk. And even though Estella knew he wasn't looking at her, she could sense that she was under a severe personal scrutiny.

Unseen hands seemed to be touching her face, brushing against the side of her arms, her hips; sampling the texture of her hair.

She shuddered and sprang back, alarmed.

But Colea grasped her shoulders. "He doesn't want to hurt you, child," she assured.

The immaterial probing fingers seemed to be inside her body now—touching her tongue, her eyes, even her brain.

Finally it was all over and she stood clutching the desk, exhausted and ashamed, her eyes lowered to the floor in embarrassment.

Fearfully, she looked up at the man. Now an aura of purplish light was coalescing over his head. The haze fought for solidity; formed into a sphere, and floated forward to hover over her own head.

She cringed and cast a terrified glance at Colea. "What is it?" she half screamed.

The ball of light dispersed into a mist and flooded down over her, seeping into her flesh. She could feel it as though it were the hot rays of the sun.

"We could never understand," the superintendent said, consoling-ly. "Not even if they chose to

explain it to us. You must prepare yourself for thousands of miraculous manifestations that you won't be able to comprehend."

The purplish light withdrew from her flesh; formed into a sphere over her head, and floated back to hover over the man and finally disperse.

"She will do," Varn said, opening his eyes. The words were pronounced slowly and precisely. And Estella was sure now that he had not even spoken her language only hours ago.

Then he smiled! Or, rather, she imagined the brief expression might have been a smile as he reached into a fold of his garment and pulled out a small, black, object. He released it and the thing floated toward her, as though moving under its own power.

Estella gasped. And, as her mouth fell open, the thing came forward in a surge of speed and plopped onto her tongue, liquefy-ing.

It was—candy!

Varn turned toward the super-intendent. "I will sign the accept-ance forms."

Complaisance added speed to Colea's steps as she went around the desk and flipped over a page in the folder.

But Estella kept her eyes riveted on the man. Now there were

at least three revolving spheres of light in the vicinity of his head. One of them halted, transformed itself into a face—the face of another man. And Varn spoke with the object in a tongue which she could not understand.

When the face had changed back into a light sphere, Colea used a stiff finger to indicate the place where Varn was to sign the form.

He glanced at the sheet and, while Estella looked in horror, writing began to flow upon the paper.

ON the morning of the fourteenth, Estella stood glumly in front of the huge window of the dormitory's south recreation room and looked out upon the oddly shaped buildings and expanses of gardens that stretched to the horizon.

Weird things fluttered about the sky, materializing and dematerializing, and other queer contraptions moved above the ground. For the thousandth time she tried to understand the shapes and their purposes, to comprehend the groupings and forms of buildings and garden areas.

But there was nothing she could understand. Outside—in the world of meaningless things and activities that existed, beyond the dormitory—was a man's world. And

women could never hope to comprehend it, not any more than she could comprehend the man himself.

"Day after tomorrow, Estella," Lera said sympathetically, walking up to stand beside her and placing an arm about her shoulder.

Estella looked away, trying to conceal the signboard of emotion that was her face.

"What will happen?" the other girl asked. "Where will you go?"

Outside, in the nearest cleared area, a group of men had gathered. It was, Estella suspected on the basis of previous observation, some sort of recreation field.

"He will take me away for two weeks," she said sullenly. "Then we will return and he will check me in at the married women's dormitory."

"Will that be all?"

"Of course not. Whenever he wants me, he will check me out again."

The males in the garden had broken up into three groups. Others had collected along the perimeter of the area to watch. Two of the observers were accompanied by women who wore metal collars. Small, golden chains extended from the collars to their husbands' hands.

"We've almost completed preparations for the party," Lera said

cheerfully.

"Party?"

"The farewell party. It will be a fine one," Lera assured.

Estella held back a sigh of remorse.

The three groups of men were in rapid, fantastic motion now. They floated agitatedly; disappeared in one section of the field, and reappeared in another. A thousand brilliant spheres of light skittered about the area, seeming to comprise, together with the antics of the men, some unguessable pattern of motion.

Was it a game? Was it some function of government? Or was it an activity in the interest of science or, perhaps, economics? Or a social function?

Estella shuddered, feeling, she imagined, much like a befuddled mouse sitting on a rafter in an ancient, pre-mutation era courtroom and watching the legal proceedings of a murder trial.

And she began to cry softly, unashamedly. "I'll never be happy," she sobbed. "How can there be such a thing as—love?"

"You want the impossible, Estella," Lera admonished. "The kind of love you're thinking of was buried in the past. And why shouldn't it be otherwise when we can't even understand them?"

A thousand things were happen-

ing on the play field. Weightless males were surging up and floating down, thrashing their arms and legs amid myriad colored and coruscating spheres of light. Blackness swept over the field, then intense brilliance. Other objects of apparently purposeless form were shapes of flickering existence.

A forum? A court of law? A scientific experiment? A game?

THETHE party got off to a boisterous and jovial start. And, for a while, the singing and games advanced at a more excited pace until the barren walls of the south recreation room rang.

Even Estella, seeking to block off the ominous presentiment of doom, joined in the fun. But, as evening progressed, her depression returned. Selecting a chair facing the window, she sat down unhappily.

It wasn't that she resented Varn—or any of the males, for that matter. What had happened to place them in a different intellectual and philosophic world from women had been unintentional, even beyond their control.

As for Varn, there was certainly nothing in him to incite resentment. When his face had changed in the brief expression of a smile, she had even wondered whether she detected traits of kindness and

solicitude deep within his character.

"You should be enjoying the party, dear." It was Superintendent Colea who had come up to stand beside her chair.

Estella grasped the woman's hand, looking up imploringly into her face. "He seemed so—so kind, when he smiled!"

"I've already told you he doesn't want to hurt you."

"But what about the collar and chain? That hurts, doesn't it? And you said our relationship with them is like a dog with its master."

"They know what's best. They might realize, in terms that we could never begin to understand, that only by accepting complete subserviency can we exist in their world."

"Their world!" Estella repeated the words with bitter remorse. "A man's world. I wish I didn't have to be in it . . . If I don't do what he wants, what will happen? Will I be punished?"

Colea shrugged.

Estella went on vindictively. "Will I be caught up by the scruff and deposited outside his door in the cold night air? Or will I get a couple of whacks on the nose, or perhaps a cuff on the rump until I whimper and nuzzle my face in his hands?"

She looked up suddenly to see most of the girls huddled around her chair, listening apprehensively.

When she had finished, they exchanged uncertain glances.

THE ceremony was simple.

In the main office of the dormitory, Estella affixed her signature to the paper and watched, with somewhat less perturbation this time, as the meaningless series of symbols and signs comprising Varn's designation flowed onto the paper.

Then there was the humiliating experience of being submitted to the collar and chain symbolism for the first time and the horror of being led out into the hostile, unknown world.

The vehicle that had awaited them outside the dormitory lifted as Varn manipulated the controls on its panel with nothing more than intense stares. Then they were floating out over the impossible city. And the terror that emanated from the mystical and incomprehensible outside world of unfamiliar objects closed in on her like a stifling pall of dread.

Briefly, however, she was thankful for the nearness of the man—a nearness that seemed to engender in her a feeling of stability and security as long as he held on to the other end of the chain attached to

her neck.

Estella had expected a long flight across half the country to some resort that teemed with the menacing presence of thousands of men. But, instead, the vehicle dropped to the concave roof of a nearby building that hurled out innumerable beams of sparkling, multicolored light in all directions toward the horizon.

They went inside, Varn still silent, and headed down a long corridor. Leading her with a strong hand on the leash, he directed her into an even more dimly lighted room that had as its furnishings but two chairs.

And, in the lesser light, the inexplicable spheres of luminescence surrounding his head were like pale satellites.

They were sitting silently, side by side, when suddenly she sensed the room was not otherwise empty. It seemed to be filled with geometrical half-forms, with vague forces, with the vestiges of a thousand balls of brilliancy until it was almost as though the entire compartment were alive around her.

She trembled and he placed a comforting, reassuring hand on her shoulder. Then, as she clung to his arm, the very walls seemed to be struggling to retain their elusive form.

But eventually they surrendered

to the tugging persistence of encroaching metamorphosis and became skies and sea; beach and palm trees; surf and wave-lashed rocks. And the ceiling was a deep blue expanse broken by irregular forms that were pale white clouds and an intense sun.

The roar of the surf was strong in her ears and a myriad birds wove meaningless patterns over surging waters in the distance. It was serene and assuring and disquieting and terrifying — all at once.

But the peacefulness eventually soothed her qualms. And for a long while they sat silently on the beach until the tide rose and the final cast of pink in the early evening sky was replaced by monochromatic shades of milky moonlight that boldly held back the brilliance of a thousand stars.

Suddenly a single satellite of light-force was revolving, pulsating, around Varn's head as he stared at it. And where there had been but a sand hill was now a small, white dwelling.

And as he took the chain to lead her toward it, she realized that her resentment was disappearing.

BUT the fear had not left!

Estella realized that with a sense of bitter alarm the next morning. The fear had not left at

all. Rather, it had been temporarily subdued by some power that had emanated from him. The calmness she had felt was but the result of a calculated maneuver to quell her apprehension so that fright would not turn her against him like an uncontrollable animal.

It had been a trick and she loathed him for it, even as he sent a materialized piece of candy darting into her mouth.

But the abhorrence was short lived —extending only until the next sunset when once more her fears were dispersed and replaced with a sense of well-being that bordered on happiness.

During each afternoon he abandoned her for a period while he let the incomprehensible balls float agitatedly around his head. And, on at least two of the days, the beach around him was a maelstrom of activity as great screens, not unlike the ones used in the dormitory's educational rooms, materialized to clutter all the available space.

And the screens displayed their scenes of frozen wastes on other worlds; of great ships darting across the black of space; of scintillating sun surfaces and geometrical forms and objects which were representative of nothing she had ever known.

On one afternoon he warned her

about the spheres. "You must not get too close to them."

"Why?" she demanded.

"It is only necessary for you to know that you must not touch them. It would be beyond your ability to understand more than that."

But the resentment that gripped her only stoked a determined spitefulness and she lunged across the beach, extending her hand toward one of the green balls to intercept it in its orbit.

In an automatic reflex, Varn reared back and the spheres moved with him in the erratic motion—like satellites following their planet—out of her reach.

But, abruptly, the sphere that was in the rear of his head exploded with a frightening blast and an ear-shattering concussion.

And a section of the sky and part of the beach were gone—transformed into a black jagged hole like the irregular space left in a jig saw puzzle by a missing piece.

Varn's expression did not change. Nor could she discern any emotional reaction in the depths of his eyes. But suddenly a fire seemed to explode inside her body. A painful lance of flame. She screamed, realizing at the same time that he had caused it; and knowing that she would never again try to touch one of the spheres.

Yet, the jagged hole in the sky and beach remained.

The fourteen days passed quickly. And, even though the experience had not been as terrifying as she had feared, there was the persistent despair of knowing that she "belonged" to a creature of an unimaginably vaster intelligence.

It was true that Varn, for the most part, was gentle and considerate. But she could only wish that when he returned her to the familiar world of dormitory life, he would not check her out again and subject her to the humiliation of the collar and leash.

ESTELLA checked into the new dormitory unobtrusively, and a thousand plans ran through her mind on how she might avoid further contact with Varn as she huddled in the welcomed loneliness of the room assigned to her.

Abruptly she realized that in all probability there would be a baby—Varn's son. But it wouldn't be like a son at all. It would only be another emotionless supercreature.

A knock sounded on the door and she lifted her face from the moist warmth of the bedspread.

"Yes?"

The door opened and a slim blonde stood on the threshold. "You're Estella?"

She ran the back of a hand across her moist cheeks and nodded encouragingly. "Then get yourself fixed up. Else you'll be late for the reception. I'm Mirene."

"Reception?"

"Of course. We welcome every bride here—with a reception and a special surprise."

"I don't want to go to any party," Estella said glumly.

Mirene came over and took her by the arm. "But you must! The girls are all waiting!"

Estella sighed and followed the blond girl.

They went down to the recreation room and walked into an atmosphere of unrestrained gaiety. Scores of women chatted animatedly while others collected at the games tables.

It was a superficial air of false abandon and cheerfulness, Estella realized. A veneer that covered the undercurrent of despair behind parties in both dormitories. Soon the general air would deteriorate, just as it did at the farewell celebrations she had attended.

But, as the afternoon progressed, their persistent buoyance became a source of puzzlement. Standing alone by the window, she wondered whether they hadn't perhaps actually found some satisfactory key of adaptation to the master-

slave existence and of accepting it without humility.

In the park area below, a group of males was engaged in their unguessable activity among the spheres of light. But she watched them only indifferently, hardly pausing to wonder whether Varn was among them.

Two girls next to her seemed to be acutely interested in the game, chatting enthusiastically as they pointed to various men.

Mirene came up.

"The superintendent," she said, "was supposed to be here by now to present your surprise. But she was checked out just before the reception started and hasn't returned. You may have to wait for it."

With only half-interest, Estella asked, "What is the surprise?"

"It's part of the indoctrination for brides."

One of the two girls at the other end of the window raised her voice excitedly. "See?" she exclaimed to her companion. "He did it!"

"Fine!" the other said, laughing. "Now watch the one in the corner on the left."

AUTOMATICALLY Estella's attention went to the man. He rose abruptly several feet, dematerialized partly and became solid once more as he descended.

"Good!" said the first girl. "Now let's see you make him turn upside down."

The man turned upside down.

Estella gasped and caught Mirene's arm. "They're making the men do things!"

"Of course," Mirene laughed. "That's part of the surprise."

"But I don't understand!"

"Ordinarily we leave the indoctrination to the superintendent. But I don't suppose it'll do any harm if I explain some of it. It's an ability that women have to force their will on the men."

Estella frowned incredulously.

"Just like a mutation gave the males superhuman intellect, another one gave the women the ability of telepathic control."

"But—"

"But," Mirene completed the protesting thought, "why haven't you heard about it before? Simply because we can't let the knowledge become common among women in the pre-marriage dormitory. If we did, it would get down to the children and, by using the ability carelessly, they would tip off the men."

"You mean," Estella asked, stupefied. "that just by thinking, we can make a man do what we want him to?"

"If you think the right way—with the conviction that he will do

it."

"Any man? Anywhere?"

"Any one you can see. Or any specific one you happen to be thinking about."

"But don't they realize? Don't they know?"

"They haven't found out yet." Mirene was smiling coyly. "It isn't as though we sent specific words telling them to do something—I don't imagine! It's just that we sent them an urge to do something. And they don't know that the urge isn't their own."

Estella was speechless.

"Try it," Mirene urged. "That man by himself—the one watching the others with his back to us."

Skeptically, Estella stared at the man and imagined him turning around. He did!

"You mustn't make them do things that are silly," Mirene cautioned. "Or they might begin to suspect. Make him walk a certain number of steps to the right."

Estella imagined him taking ten paces to a new position along the edge of the field.

This time she was only slightly less astonished when he complied.

Mirene nudged Estella slyly in the ribs. "That collar doesn't seem so repulsive now, does it?"

Abruptly, Estella realized that it didn't. As a matter of fact she chuckled inwardly, she could al-

most imagine herself wearing it with a certain sense of cunning-satisfaction.

For a moment she thought of Varn. Now, it would be different. He could think he was ordering her around. And perhaps he would be—but not all the time. There would be an occasional instance in which her will would be dominant without his knowing it.

"Of course," Mirene offered, "there are certain rules to follow. But the superintendent will tell you about them."

Estella's thoughts went back to Varn. He and other males could have their unfathomable philosophy and way of life and incomprehensible technology. It was a world into which women could never fit any way, not any more than a dumb animal could be integrated into ancient human society. But there were other things that women could understand more about than men.

She wondered what he was doing now. Then, cautiously, she conjured up a picture of his coming to the dormitory in half an hour and checking her out. He would know where to take her.

VARN looked up from his work, suddenly alert. She had learned quickly. Already she was calling. With a sense of amusement, he lis-

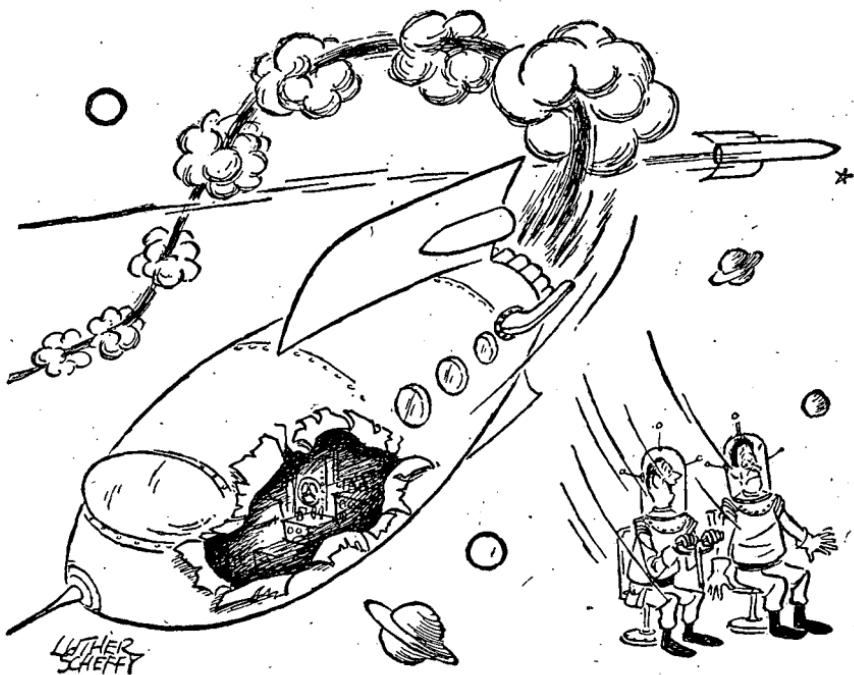
tened. Then he arranged before his eyes the schedule he had selected for the rest of the day. Nothing so important that it couldn't be postponed. If there had been, he could easily plant the counter-impulse in her mind that would influence her to cancel the "order."

He set two force-action contrubators in ready orbits and miliated from the second sub-positive edge-

phase, thinking that, after all, it was such a small price to pay for a contented womanhood.

And, for some reason, his thoughts returned to consideration of the ancient days when a small animal chased a primitive four-wheeled vehicle . . . and probably thought his frightening gutteral attack was solely responsible for putting it to flight.

THE END



"How's that for a tight turn?"

**Nobody had ever flown through space, still
I was supposed to do it and bring back an alien
for Marsten's circus. Nonsense, you say? Meet—**

MARTY THE MARTIAN

By

Arnold Marmor

IT'S still very clear in my mind. The whole episode. The afternoon visit to Marsten's office, the trip to Mars, and the journey back.

It was one of those warm summer afternoons. All one craved for was a patch of green grass to recline on and maybe a faint breeze to tingle one's forehead. I was sure of the grass and hopeful for the breeze. But one of Marsten's messengers popped up and the grass and the breeze would have to wait. After all, Marsten was my boss.

He had his office in the Empire State Building. Norbert Marsten was the owner of the Marsten Circus, the greatest, biggest, loudest circus in the world. And if you don't believe it, ask Mr. Marsten.

"Sit down, Nick," he invited, speaking from one corner of his mouth as the other corner was busy chewing a dollar cigar. Marsten was

a small man with sleek black hair. A small man with big ideas.

I sat down.

"Nick, you're the best 'bring 'em back alive' man I've got. The best."

This was very true. "You've got a job for me," I said.

"That's correct."

"So why the buildup? Tell me what you want."

"I want something that no other circus has."

"You must be kidding. You have every known animal there is. Why, the bushmaster I brought you two months ago is the longest—"

"It isn't exactly an animal I want."

"Oh? You mean you want a performer? What the hell have I got to do—"

"What I want is out of this world."

"A different kind of act? I still say—"

"I want a Martian."

I was glad I didn't have a mirror in front of my face. I could imagine how foolish I looked with my mouth hanging open.

"I even have a name picked out for him," Marsten persisted. "Marty, the Martian. What do you think of that?"

I stood up slowly. "Let me know when you've recovered."

Marsten came around the desk. "Sit down. Now listen to me. Did you ever hear of a man named Hendrick Ritter?"

"No."

"The greatest scientist in the world. He's been working for me for over a year. I hired him to do one particular job for me: to concoct a fuel that will get a space ship to Mars and back. Well, it's done. Did you ever hear of a man named Sam Young?"

"Same answer as before."

"He's a designer for air ships. The best in the business. He's finished a job for me. And, Nick, it's already built. And I've got Joe Roane working for me."

"I've heard of him," I said.

"The greatest pilot in the world," Marsten said.

"The greatest this, the greatest that. And for what? Why, the ship probably won't get off the ground."

Marsten chewed furiously on his cigar. "But what if it does get off

the ground? What if it does get to Mars?"

"All right. So what? How do you know there's life on Mars?"

"There is. I hired the greatest—"

"Oh, no," I groaned. "I believe you, I believe you. So now we're on Mars."

"You capture a Martian and bring him back."

"What if he doesn't care to be captured?"

"What do I pay you for?"

I thought this out, then said, "To capture Martians."

"Exactly."

"You wouldn't settle for a moon maiden, would you? I heard they're cute. And sexy."

"A Martian." He was very adamant. "I'll have the greatest attraction in the world. Nick, I'm the kind who gets what he wants. I've spent over three million dollars on this project and I'm ready to spend another three million. Just get me my Martian and you'll be a rich man. You'll be rich enough to quit working for me and to tell me to go to hell. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"I'd like that very much."

TWO weeks later we went to Arizona. A week after that we took off. I didn't really think we would. But we did.

Just me and Joe Roane. Two

men in a space ship.

A huge metal tube hurtling through the longest and blackest of nights.

Joe Roane was a good-looking chap. Good-looking, young, and excited. He was the first to pilot a ship to Mars. He was looking ahead to the glory that awaited him.

We landed on Mars.

We put on helmets that Ritter and Young had made for us. We stepped down the metal ladder.

They were there, waiting for us.

I'd rather have faced a bushmaster or a rhino.

They stood on three legs. They had globe bellies, tiny heads, and no necks. They were of a color I had never seen before. They had two arms with two hands attached to each arm. I suppose they were hands. They were more like claws.

I stood frozen solid. Joe Roane screamed and turned to run back up the ladder. A beam flashed and Joe fell forward, silent and very dead.

After that it was all a blank.

When I came to I was strapped down by metal clasps on a long board made of some kind of marble. I was alone for some time.

I don't remember how long it was before one of them appeared. He stood by my side, looking down at me. His eyes were purple. There were no whites. "You have come a

long way," he said.

"You—you speak English?"

"We used a 64-V machine on you. We learned your language, your thoughts, your name. We know about Norbert Marsten. A very enterprising man, it seems."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"We haven't decided yet. So you were going to take one of us back with you for Marsten's circus. To exhibit one of us to your stupid race. My followers wanted to kill you when this information was learned. But I believe I have a better idea."

He went away. I yelled for him to come back. I yelled till my throat was dry. Eventually he did come back. He came back with Joe Roane and . . . myself.

"I want you to meet Klar and Grat," he said. "They have taken over your bodies; you will take theirs—and return to Marsten. We have a transformer machine to accomplish this. Only we never had an opportunity to use it until you were so gracious as to visit us." He spoke on, telling me of his idea. I shuddered and wished for death. I begged him to kill me.

Then a contraption was fitted over me and it hummed and I passed out. I remember the trip back to earth.

I'M no longer Nick Faber. I'm Marty the Martian. What a cute title Marsten had hung on me. I've got a nice home and I get plenty to eat. Only my home is a cage and it's made of glass. People come from all over the world just to see me. And Marsten has been to see me every day. He chews on his big cigar and there's a smile on his face a yard wide.

I've tried to talk to my keepers but all I can manage is some crazy kind of gibberish. I also see Klar

and Grat. But they're only there when Marsten is around. They're keeping very close to him. My being transformed into a Martian was just part of it. Klar and Grat were going to carry out the rest of it.

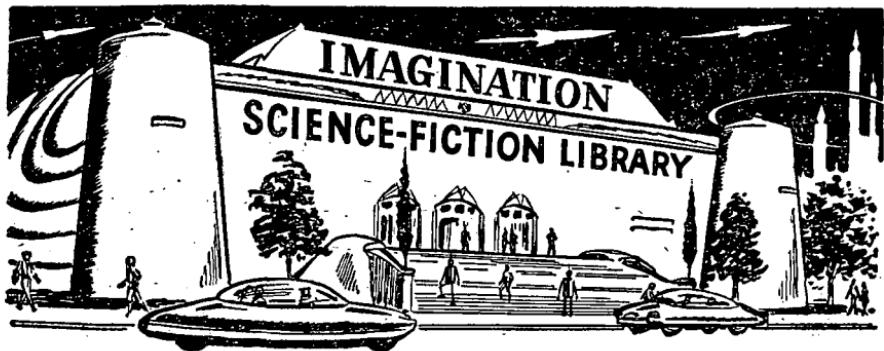
On one dark night, and very soon, Klar, Grat, and Marsten were going to disappear.

Maybe I was the greatest attraction on earth. But Norbert Marsten was going to be the greatest attraction on Mars.

THE END



"When you've finished playing the fool,
Hadley, we'll get on with the expedition!"



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review several titles — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

MISSION OF GRAVITY

by Hal Clement. 224 pages, \$2.95. Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York.

Posed the problem, "How would humans and natives react to life on a planet whose gravity was hundreds of times as great as that of Earth?" Hal Clement proceeds with an analytical study the equal of his famed "Needle."

Mesklin, the hypothetical planet, was a natural laboratory for the study of the most mysterious of forces, gravity. But how could Earthmen work on such a world, a world whereon even the mighty power of the rocket was of small avail? Only by allying himself with the diminutive inhabitants, could the Terran scientist find sat-

isfactory answers.

With scientific exactness and verisimilitude, Clement proceeds to discuss in fantastic detail every phase of living and moving in this world without violating any known scientific laws. And that is Clement's strength. Gifted with a natural ability for writing well, and coupled with a scientific background, Clement is able to take this alien atmosphere and make it as believable as your living room!

In a magazine article, Clement told of the painstaking way in which he backgrounded this story. That work is evident in the quality of this. If you want to read science-fiction with *science*, this book is for you!

THE SINISTER RESEARCHES OF C. P. RANSOM

by H. Nearing, Jr. 217 pages, \$2.95.
Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York.

Here is a delightful collection of the doings of Professor Ransom whose extraordinary faculty for applying mathematics — the more abstruse the better—leaves his colleagues usually in a disturbed state!

The Four-Color problem, the Möbius strip and the Klein Bottle, the Four-Dimensional Continuum, and a dozen other commonplace curiosities of mathematics give Nearing a starting point for as entertaining a bunch of tales as you could wish for. Imagine a basketball game played with a hyperspherical ball

which alternately shrinks to a point and waxes to the size of a basketball! Even the pot-bellied faculty can't lose with such an advantage.

With time-travel thrown in for good measure—Ransom goes to Rome! — Nearing presents eleven delightful stories. Ordinarily it is difficult to find a twist to a mathematical idea—unlike that of a scientific idea—which will be both entertaining and yet reasonable. H. Nearing does this better than anyone. To wrap a story around a curious mathematical fact like the problem of coloring a map with a minimum number of colors, is not easy.

REVOLT IN 2100

by Robert A. Heinlein. 317 pages, \$3.50. Shasta Publishers, 5525 Blackstone, Chicago, Ill.

If you haven't read "If This Goes On," "Coventry", or "Misfit", the three stories reprinted in this book, run—don't walk—immediately to your bookstore and buy REVOLT IN 2100.

In fact, even if you have read them, read this book anyway, because "If This Goes On" has been rewritten and almost doubled in length. To top it off, the book also offers an introduction by Henry Kuttner with preface by Heinlein.

If this all seems like exaggerated praise, don't worry. It is meant to be. In science-fiction Heinlein stands high above all but a handful of contemporaries. Whether you like writing, characterization, action—or all—Heinlein's stuff has

them.

The greater portion of the book is devoted to "If This Goes On". It is simply the story of Nehemiah Scudder's tyrannical theocratic dictatorship of the United States. Does that sound incredible? It isn't at all when it's presented as it is here, through the eyes of a simple soldier of the theocracy.

John Lyle, the soldier, falls in love with a Virgin destined for the Prophet and that incident sets the stage for the Revolt. It is a magnificent tale.

"Coventry", also part of the Future History which Heinlein tries to make reasonable—and succeeds—tells of the individualist fighting a regimented society.

"Misfit" relates the story of the computing wizard Libby, building a Lunar Base. Don't miss these!



Conducted by Mari Wolf:

NOT so long ago in Pasadena I attended a two part lecture on the subjects "Science" and "Science Fiction." There were two speakers: science, rocket science in particular, being discussed by Dr. Powell of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and science fiction by Forrest J. Ackerman. The program was held in the library as part of public library week. The audience was varied; some coming for one part of the program and some for the other, and the audience knowledge of the subjects under discussion ranged from that of the serious student to that of the novice.

In the two part lecture by Dr. Powell and Mr. Ackerman the audience was especially varied. Some of its members seemed particularly interested in flying saucers, and except for trying to find out the speakers' opinions on the saucer

sightings they had little other enthusiasm for the material under discussion. Some of the audience were out and out science fiction fans. Many people, though, came to hear about rockets: their questions were direct and to the point. How high did the V-2's go? How large were they? Didn't the Germans plan to build still bigger ones? How much bigger? How long will it be before we build a space station? How many steps would there be in a rocket reaching orbital or escape velocity?

The questions were on performance either present or future. The problems to be overcome in order to reach that performance were not stressed. Charts of fuel and oxidizers and the resultant velocities, of temperature and the speed of sound at high altitudes, of rocket design and development weren't nearly as vital to the audience as the results

of all the gathered data: what will man find in space, and how will he get there?

For every person who wants to study the basic how's and why's of any science there are many who want only an empirical knowledge of its results. And many who do become students of some particular science or technology do so because, in the beginning, their interest was stimulated by some graphic portrayal of the results in that field, whether actual or prophetic. Here, giving a basic layman's grasp of many of the abstract ideas of today's science and tomorrow's technology, you find science fiction.

If people are to have any knowledge of technology and science they have to learn a lot on the layman level; there just isn't time in one individual life span to become a specialist in more than a few fields. In the simpler society a few wise men can carry and transmit the cultural heritage of their group; in a society like ours the wisest man may have trouble keeping abreast in a general way with the changing frontiers of knowledge.

Science fiction, besides discussing the possible worlds of tomorrow, reflects a lot about the world of today. The young fan can absorb, without even realizing it, quite a bit of anthropology, sociology, biology, and even physics for the layman. Perhaps he will specialize in one of the sciences; if he does, he will probably retain a general interest in science as it relates to the whole culture instead of becoming submerged in one aspect of one field of study. If he

doesn't, he at least will be conversant with many of the mainstreams of modern thought.

Which, in returning to the idea of the two part lecture, leaves me with an interesting conclusion: that you can get more ideas across to more people by using a science fiction medium than you can with a dozen textbooks. Escapism? Maybe. But at least it can serve a useful purpose . . .

* * *

Don't forget it's getting close to Convention time again. If you are within traveling distance of San Francisco this Labor Day Weekend you'll have a wonderful time if you drop in on the 12th World Science Fiction Convention. You'll meet fans and pros from all over the country, attend a fine program on science fiction past, present and future. This year the annual West Coast Convention, the Westercon, is combined with the national affair; come early and you'll attend two for the price of one . . . The price? You can join the Convention Committee and attend the convention for just a dollar—banquet and auction profits will make up the rest of the cost of running the Convention.

Send your dollar to: 12th World Science Fiction Convention, Box 385, Station "A", Richmond 2, California. If you want to find out any more details, such as the hours scheduled for the program or hotel reservations, you can find out from the same address. If you can possibly make it to San Francisco over the Labor Day Weekend why not try to attend? You'll have a

wonderful time.

* * *

Now to the fanzines.

PSYCHOTIC: 10c; Richard Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland, Oregon. As expected, very, very good. Geis seems (and rightfully, I think) inclined to put out a rather slim (26-page) zine rather than pad it with poor material just for the sake of quantity. Vernon McCain's column, "Padded Cell," is an excellent example of an intelligent fan article.

I notice that Geis doesn't number his pages. Wonder how he keeps them straight while printing? Maybe does them in 1, 2, 3 order?

The lily white monster comes complete with all accessories: zine reviews by Geis, columns by Harlan Ellison and Bill Reynolds, and also some of the best art going now by Dave English.

As a parting shout, the respect shown to white space in the zine is something that could stand copying. Too many fan editors seem to feel that since they have to pay for all of the paper they're certainly going to use it all.

* * *

SPACESHIP: 15c or 2/25c; quarterly; Bob Silverberg, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N. Y. A gentleman (he must be a gentleman; he graduated from Rutgers) named Larry Stark is the jewel in this issue. Has both a poem and a short short story. I don't think he will produce fanzine material much longer though; it shouldn't be long till he sells his stuff and becomes a dirty old pro... And, for

that matter, I've seen worse stories than his "Interview" sell for a cent and a half_a word.

Redd Boggs is represented by his File 13 column, along with Bert Hirschorn, Roger Dard, and Terry Carr.

* * *

SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER: 20c; quarterly; 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, Calif. I think that if I wanted to show someone unfamiliar with the field just what an amateur science fiction magazine could be I'd choose the *Advertiser* as a prime example. For one thing, it's a fine looking publication, photo offset, with excellent Morris Scott Dollens covers. In addition to being an advertising medium it has always carried some of the best essays on the science fiction field that you'll find anywhere. Its criticisms of an aspect of the field or a particular writer are true criticisms. In fact, for the reader who takes the ideas of science fiction seriously and is interested in their background and development the *Advertiser* is one of the best buys there is.

With this issue there's a new section: the Spec. Department. Here you'll find speculations on just about every idea in the field, all written by fans and pros who've given real thought to the idea they are speculating on. Maybe you won't agree with some of their conclusions; maybe you'll take the "What if . . . ?" that they postulate and work the premise through to a totally different conclusion. That's one of the purposes of the department—to make the reader

speculate also.

"What if . . . ?" is just about the most fascinating game there is. Ever start speculating about a world without speculation? An intelligent race that is nonetheless incurious?

But back to this issue of the Advertiser. You'll find specs by Oliver King Smith, John Harrington, and Ken Jensen, all in different fields, all quite far off the beaten track of present day thought, and all fine, basic ideas for stf:

Of course, if you collect science fiction you probably already read this magazine. It's about the best trade journal in the field, and so much more besides.

* * *

HENCE: 15c; John G. Fletcher, 347 Oak Road, Glenside, Penn. Here is the first issue of a zine that could develop into a first rate thing. It contains an interesting article by Al Stauderman about a TV show he occasionals on, "Atom Squad."

"My Friend Molith" by Bobby Warner is a change from the usual fan fiction. Here's a story that doesn't have a gimmick or trick ending—just a rather quiet, well told tale. Warner should stick to this type of story. (Not necessarily horror, but non gimmick stuff.) The two other short stories by Don Donnell and Warren F. Link and the short novel by Dorothy Towlie are average for a first issue zine.

* * *

INFINITY: 15c; Charles Harris, 85 Fairview Ave., Great Neck, N. Y. Here is a rather successful experi-

ment with color. I'll admit that some zines are brighter but in "Infinity" the color seems part of the thing—not something poured on as an afterthought. There are two articles, by Harlan Ellison and Cal Beck. Ellison is concerned with the number of promags on the stands, forcing the reader to wade through four bad tales to read a good one. He has a logical argument. Sooner or later a lot of these mags will fold, leaving only the better ones. (Look at the number that have sprung up, hung on for a few issues, and fallen by the wayside within the last couple of years.)

Cal Beck wants multiple world conventions, thus eliminating costly travel. Don't think it'll ever work. People are snobbish enough to want to go to the world con, not to one of the world conventions. And there are already a lot of regional conferences held for those unable to attend the big one.

* * *

FOG: 5c; Don Wegars, 2444 Valley St., Berkeley, Calif. Considering that this is his second issue, this should be a very good zine soon. Wegars admits that Fog is trying to look like *Psychotic*. I think he was wise in deciding to follow *Psycho*'s format. Fog's cover, particularly, is much easier to look at than so many of the "fill the whole page" school.

Inside is a column by Geis, a review of the TV "Topper" by Ron Ellik and Close Look At Collectors by Carol McKinney. Carol classifies the collectors all the way from Completist (who save every-

thing) to Mag Manglers (self explanatory). Do you fall into any of the categories?

* * *

DEVIANT: 15c; Carol McKinney, 377 E. 1st North, Provo, Utah. Vee Hampton has a column, "Broom Closet Rocketeer" that is interesting. It also mentions the United States Rocket Society. Here on the West Coast the U. S. Rocket Society is quite a mystery. No one seems to know anything about the club or its aims. If anyone really knows, drop me a line.

Terry Carr has a nice bit on one shots in his "Face Critters." As a whole this zine is well done, good mimeo and layout.

* * *

DAWN: 10c; Russell K. Watkins, 110 Brady St., Savannah, Georgia. Rather well put together zine. A cute bit of satire by Art Kunwiss called "Extras"—true, too. Terry Carr is making quite a splash with his Face Critters; I see them in quite a few zines. In this issue Carr has a pageful. Don't miss Ray Thompson's column "Slag"; it's rambling but very readable.

* * *

SPACE DIVERSIONS: Norman Shorrock, 12A Rumford Place, Liverpool 3, England. American price for this one is 20c a copy or 3/50c; it may also be received in exchange for up to date fanzines or prozines. It's free to you if you happen to be a member of the Liverpool Science Fiction Society.

Space Diversions is a very good zine. Shorrock, John Roles and David Gardner can well be proud of their publication. The quality

of the writing is exceptionally high for a fanzine. After reading some of the fiction here you can refute the common cry that "fan fiction should be left out of fanzines because it's usually so bad." Trouble is, most zines don't get such good material to print.

David Gardner's "Two Came Back," for example, is a space opera, alien menace story that's very readable indeed. The story idea is a good one: an alien civilization trying to win a war with Earth by surrendering and then infesting Earth with android counterparts of Earth's war prisoners. The story is action filled, with good dialogue and characterization as good as that found in the majority of space opera. It's not great literature, sure, but I bet Gardner could have sold it . . .

The issue I have here is an extra large one: 108 pages. However, you don't have the feeling it's padded. Everything belongs, from the editor's report on the London Convention of '53 to the rest of the fiction and the poetry.

Very well written.

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; published twice a month; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y. It wouldn't do much good to review the contents of individual issues here. This one is strictly a newszine, and the news would be old hat by the time you saw it here. It's sufficient to say that in F-T you can keep up on what's going on in the science fiction field: magazines starting up or changing editors or format or folding, books

to be published, movies or TV or radio shows about stf.

It's a long established, extremely reliable source of information about science fiction and its personalities.

* * *

S FANZINE: 10c or 10/\$1.00; Samuel Johnson, 1517 Penny Drive, Edgewood, Elizabeth City, N. C. This is a well mimeoed zine and quite thick. The first thing I happened to notice in it was a bit reprinted from the *Saucerian* concerning high altitude rockets. I don't know how, but they seem to have managed to hang the title "Project Aphrodite" on the V2-Wac Corporal that went up 250 miles. Wasn't "Project Aphrodite" the hoax article that came out in '49 and wasn't the name for the series of V2-Wac Corporal tests "Bumper Project?" I was interested in the article though. It showed general disbelief that our rockets have never broken the 250 mile record. Of course there is the possibility that there are scores of small spent rockets orbiting around up there now. Considering their size, it would be practically impossible to spot them.

The fiction section is handled by Carol McKinney and Terry Carr with the usual articles, departments, and letters following.

* * *

ECLIPSE: 3/25c; Raymond Thompson, 410 S. 4th St., Norfolk, Neb. From the front rearward (or in this case, backward) we have a column by the editor showing some interesting financial comparisons between ditto and

mimeo. Next, according to the contents page, we have something called "Inertia" by Joel Nydahl. I didn't read this. I couldn't. It just wasn't there.

John Fletcher has a story called "Fumbler." Outside from being obvious, it's not bad. Concerning the poetry section, "Poetry that will probably remain unread," I suggest a title change to "Poetry that should remain unread!"

There is also an agreeable column by Burt Beerman and a bunch of letters from all sorts of people.

* * *

FIE: 15c; Harry Calneck, Granville Ferry, Nova Scotia, Canada. There is a tremendous cartoon in here by Joe Keogh. I won't describe it though; that would ruin it.

There's a lot of fiction in this zine. "Selection" by Joe Koegh; "Planetfall" by Des Emery; "Nightlife" by Carol McKinney; and a "fact" article by Joe Koegh, "The Origins of Galactic Superstition." "Selection" was good as was "Planetfall" but "Nightlife" could have stood revision. "The Galactic Superstition" article was topped slightly by Daryl Sharp's bit, "The Shaving Mystery."

* * *

HYPHEN: 2/25c; Walt Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Rd., Belfast, North Ireland. *Hyphen*, like any zine Walt associates with, has the Willis touch. It's slightly zany, but you'll get a wonderful, if slanted, picture of a certain segment of overseas fandom.

The issue I have here concludes Walt's "Coroncon Report, or Through Darkest England Burning

the Candle at Both Ends." According to WAW, this Con was more like an American one, with people gathering in private parties after the regular sessions, dodging the hotel staff from floor to floor, and improving on American Conventioneering by dropping bottles down the hotel chimneys . . . On this side of the "Atlantic," though, water pistols are *not* standard fan attire, as they seemed to be at the overseas convention.

Bob Shaw reports on his bicycle, and Chuck Harris gives another Convention report in "All Our Yesterdays."

* *

HAEMO GOBLIN: 20c or 1 current prozine; Alan Mackie, 80 East Road, Irvine, Ayrshire, Scotland. Frederick L. Smith edits this new zine, and he has turned out a very good first issue. Brian Miller handles the artwork; publisher Mackie the printing.

This first issue contains J. T. McIntosh's article on "Writing for a Living" and Bob Lindon's discussion, "Aldous Huxley: Science Fiction Writer." And Ken Slater inquires, "Are There Too Many Fanclubs?"

I hope this zine keeps going.

* * *

SPIRAL: 10c; Denis Moreen, 214 9th St., Wilmette, Ill. Geis has a column here. He's a bit severe but quite just. (Say, considering the zine Geis edits would you call him a "crazy mixed up id"?).

The bit of fiction that caught my eye was "The Voice in the Shell," by Dennis Murphy. Could be Dennis Murphy is sometimes Denis Moreen?

Ray Thompson did an amusing bit on how to reject a manuscript called "Phrenitis." Now that we know how to gracefully send rejected scripts how about advice on how to gracefully receive them?

Whoops, almost forgot the cover. It's a multi-colored thing showing a rocket, taken, I think, from *Colliers*, being fired. This looks like the Pacific Rocket Society, everybody so busy watching gadgets they don't see the rocket go.

* * *

Well, that's all for this time. Remember, send your fanzines to me, Mari Wolf, *Fandora's Box*, IMAGINATION, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill. See you next issue.

And, I hope, in San Francisco along about Labor Day.

—Mari Wolf

ANNOUNCING:—

Imaginative Tales

—The great new companion magazine to IMAGINATION—
FIRST ISSUE FEATURING

A BOOK LENGTH **TOFFEE** NOVEL by Charles F. Myers
ON SALE FIRST WEEK IN JULY!



"Just think, Megler . . . untold ages ago this
plain was the bottom of a thriving sea!"

L etters

from the R eaders

"BEST" FOR ANTHOLOGIES . . .

Dear Ed:

No mere words can describe the vile trick you have played on me. You stated very plainly in the April issue that the May *Madge* would go on sale March 26th. I took pains to get to the newsstand on the 25th. You can imagine how shocked I was to see the May issue waiting for me—it had beaten me to the stands again!

I was interested in Sheckley's autobiography and reasonably surprised to learn that he had sold his first story to IMAGINATION. Yet there are no stories from *Madge* in the BALLANTINE collection of his stories. In other words, you printed his first and latest stories, but not his best . . .

In closing, your letter column does have a certain freshness to it. The readers of *Startling Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories* are too blasé to give a direct reply to anything said in the letter sections of those magazines. I have delib-

erately trod on as many toes as possible in a vain effort to stir up a few comments. But no one has written me. BUT, I have received thirteen letters since a letter of mine appeared in *Madge*—and the issue hasn't been on sale here more than a week!

John Courtois
318 E. Commercial St.
Appleton, Wisc.

Madge going on sale a day early in Appleton will keep you on your toes, John! We have not read the Ballantine collection of Bob Sheckley's stories. The fact that none of them were reprinted from *Madge* does not mean that the Sheckley stories in IMAGINATION were of a lesser degree of merit. Those who edit anthologies choose what they consider to be the best. Their choices do not necessarily mean they are correct; very often certain magazines are "passed over" for one reason or another. Too, we recall a specific case in point which occurred this year which points up the fact that sometimes anthologies

LETTERS FROM THE READERS

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are not what they purport themselves to be, to wit, the best . . . We refer to the forthcoming book, *THE EDITORS CHOICE OF SCIENCE FICTION*. We were contacted the day after Xmas last by the editor of this anthology and told of its plans—of which the book's title is self-explanatory—and requested to ok the use of a story from Madge that had been selected by the anthology editor and a publisher's staff from the book company. While the story they had selected was a good one—all Madge stories are, we feel!—we had a personal preference for another story. We wrote this anthology editor about a week after receiving his letter and suggested that if the book were to be in truth an "Editor's Choice" as the title suggested, we submitted our personal choice in preference to rubber-stamping their own private selection from Madge. We heard not a single word from either the publishers, or the editor of the anthology thereafter, except that we did receive a letter a few days ago from the editor—many months after the gentleman had contacted us concerning the anthology—to the effect that he was sorry IMAGINATION was not to be represented in the *EDITORS CHOICE OF SCIENCE FICTION* due to shortness of time in meeting deadlines, etc. While we do not know if the stories included in the book from other magazines were actually the "choice" of the editors of those magazines; we do know that IMAGINATION was excluded from the book because we had the temerity

to make a choice! From the foregoing facts we can only conclude that this forthcoming book *THE EDITORS CHOICE OF SCIENCE FICTION* was not intended to be an editors' choice, but merely a device to capitalize on the names of well-known editors in the field. With our experience only in mind we question the forthrightness of such a title and have to feel that the title of the book is a misnomer. It is an experience such as we have outlined that makes us wonder sometimes as to the worth of various anthologies. Editors and their publishers—whether they are in the book or magazine field, have a duty to play fair with all concerned; it is to be mourned that such is not always the case. But then, as in the case of the aforementioned book, the public was not meant to know that an editor's choice for IMAGINATION's contribution was apparently not satisfactory—although the title of the book suggested it would be. So don't take an anthology too literally as to its literary value! wlh

"US'UNS OR THE ROOSHUNS"

Dear Bill:

I thought I'd better write in to you before you let your glands get away with you. First, this matter of "Us'uns or the Rooshuns" is rather touchy as you probably know now from reader reaction. The trouble is that you, Mr. Hecht, and Mr. Sabsay, are not using the "cold logic" you seem to be trying to convince everyone else of. You are thinking with your glands and a

pre-conditioned mind, and cannot, in any way, express a way out of the situation.

I have a high regard for you, but you are going at the argument in a way that will get us all into hot water. The government is well aware of fandom, and all its viewpoints; so is the public although you may not think so. They know what we are, and we are too blithe to see what danger there is in a "friendly discussion between fans".

This new deal, political discussion of control of a theoretical space station, is bad for the lot of us. Don't laugh at this, as I'm not kidding. Most people have ideas of us that are not at all flattering, and for the most part are true. They don't understand our viewpoint, and that's dangerous for fans since we are in the minority.

We can speak glibly about sex, religion and politics, and not be offended in the least when another fan expresses his views. But for others these things are deadly serious. I am not particularly disturbed over any fan discussion of sex or religion, but in politics we are delving into a very touchy situation and it should be squelched fast! I don't care whether you publish this letter or not, but please stop this business before it goes too far...

Samuel Johnson
1517 Penny Drive
Edgewood

Elizabeth City, N. C.

To be perfectly honest with you, Sam, your letter doesn't make a bit of sense to us—except by implica-

tion. You're referring obviously to our views on USA control of a space station rather than one controlled by the UN which we maintain would be handing the project over to Russia via diplomatic channels. We published your letter here because if the implications we get from it are correct we feel something should be said. Do you infer that active fans should not discuss science fiction in any politically significant manner because their views will be dangerous to them in the sense that some may have a "pinkish" outlook or background? You say the government and the public is well aware of the viewpoints of fandom. Just what are the viewpoints of fandom? You have awakened in us an awareness of a situation—possible that is—that we have not known existed. To be perfectly blunt, if fandom or any segment of fandom has a "pink" touch to it we feel such a group or segment should come to the attention of the proper authorities. If any discussion in the pages of IMAGINATION embarrasses any particular fan, so be it. We have no intention of stopping a discussion in which Russia pops up as a villain simply because some may consider it too "hot" a subject. Indeed, if that is the case we shall do our utmost to exploit and continue such a discussion. It is no secret that your editor has no use for Russia, and certainly that he feels any precaution should be taken to safeguard technological advances wherever the Reds are concerned. If this implication was not what you intended for Madge's readers, please cor-

rect us wlh

SCIENCE AND FICTION . . .

Dear Bill:

I liked the May issue of *Madge* but I haven't quite recovered from the page cut to enjoy it fully. I've always liked St. Reynard and hope to see a good long story by him in the future.

The cover was very good and the rest of the issue was fair; the best shorts being Sheckley and Galouye. Keep those wonderful cartoons coming but please tell Luther Scheffy to get some new BEMs!

In closing I'd like to get a few words in on the ever-present question of stressing science or fiction. I'm in favor of science and I'm sick and tired of hearing those people who are against it saying that they don't want to plow through mazes of equations and formulas when they read a story. These are not prime requisites! A story can have a well thought-out scientific plot without doing it in Einsteinian proportions. I think the fascinating science in science-fiction is what makes it the great literature it is.

I hope that *Madge* keeps the good stories coming while other magazines fall by the wayside:

Bob Cobb
488 Appleton St.
Arlington 74, Mass.

As you say, Bob, science dished up in an entertaining story is ok. And in reference to your last paragraph, we'll keep them coming and step over the bodies! wlh

A DANGEROUS "DANGER"?

Dear Bill:

You've done it again!

What's that? you ask. Why, St. Reynard's THE GIANTS FROM OUTER SPACE in the May issue. I can say with sincerity that St. Reynard's novel was one of the best I've read in a long, long time. On a par with his THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE in the April '53 issue.

Your editorial, if I may remark, was intriguing. I have a telescope myself, a Sky Scope which can hit up to 120 diameters. After reading your editorial I regained some confidence in myself. You see, I've seen an "object" on the Moon, but was a bit afraid to believe I did. Your editorial cleared that up. Others have seen it. Which means it must exist, and if it does, it's definitely not something from Terra. Suggestion: Why don't they train the big scope at Palomar on Luna?

A subject of much conversation these days is the incredible progress which our race has made within the last fifty years. If one stops to reflect, really *think* about it, he will be downright amazed. For nearly five milleniums we stumbled along the course to civilization taking step after plodding step. Then something forced us to break into a run. Forced us, I said.

Call it whatever you want—but whatever it is, with it, we sense danger. Danger.

World tension is growing—being strained to the breaking point. When danger exists, tension mounts. In general, madness is running on its berserk way around the globe.

IMAGINATION

Danger can often lend itself to madness.

Why did we progress so fast, stride up the technological ladder so far during the last fifty years? Progress like mad, leaving the social sciences far behind. Why?

At the approach of danger the thing threatened speeds up, tries to get a defense ready. What I am trying to lead up to is that for the last fifty years we have sensed the approach of danger, danger on a scale so vast that it makes us do in fifty years what by all rights should have taken another five hundred. The incredible advancements are an attempt to throw up a defense, an unconscious (to us) attempt to ward off the coming danger.

I'm beginning to lose sleep nights—if this theory is valid, *what is this danger?*

Ought to make quite a story!

Barry Miller
Gallaudet College
Kendall Green
Washington 2, D. C.

Lookout, boys, a space armada is on the way to Earth! . . . But seriously, you have an interesting view on our sudden rapid technological advances. Anybody care to comment? wlh

ST. REYNARD-KREPPS

Dear Ed:

Having finished reading part of the May issue of *Madge*, I thought I'd drop you a line and let you know how I liked it. I suppose that readers help a lot in the planning of each issue and I'd like to add my own voice.

McCauley's cover was fine. I just finished looking over a stack of old AMAZING STORIES and I think this latest cover on IMAGINATION is almost as good as some they had. And they really had some covers!

THE GIANTS FROM OUTER SPACE by St Reynard was good! I bet that title drew a lot of readers. People like "big" things, and that giant on the spaceship was *really* big!

You should have Geoff St. Reynard do more stories for you. By the way, is he the same person who wrote a story with H. L. Gold under the pen-name of R. W. Krepps? You should get them to do a story for *Madge* as they had one in AMAZING a while back that was really Zorch!

One thing I like about *Madge* is the fan magazine review section. But of course the stories are the main thing, and I like the ones in *Madge* now. I think they're tops!

Robert R. Stewart
2123 West St.
Berkeley 2, Cal.

Geoff St. Reynard is a pen-name for Robert W. Krepps. Bob writes books and other insignificant stuff under his real name, but for his important work—science fiction!—he uses the name Geoff St. Reynard. As far as we can tell it's a case where the pen-name is more popular than the real one. As to more yarns by Krepps-St. Reynard, Geoff has the cover novel next month — VENGEANCE FROM THE PAST. It's a great story you won't want to miss so better put July 29th on your calendar right

now as an important date—when the September issue goes on sale. (Better yet turn to page 130 and subscribe, getting your choice of three science fiction books free. It's a great offer.) . . . wlh

FIE ON SPACE SKEPTICS . . .

Dear WLH:

Did someone say your covers are improving? Something the same idea as if you were standing on the north pole and started to move; the only way you could move is south. The covers on *Madge* are so awful that if a change comes it can only be for the better. But who cares about covers anyway? Not me.

Ah! Now we come to the inside of the magazine—the part we pay our 35c for. It's been so long since *Madge* ran a bad story that the readers are probably beginning to wonder what one's like. I do wish you'd get a longer letter column and fanzine review section; they are the most interesting parts of the magazine. I always read them as soon as I get my copy of *Madge*.

Here's another few words about the same thing Ray Schaffer was talking about in the May reader section. If anyone tries to show you that rockets could never get off the Earth, agree with them by showing how easily it can be done. For example, it can be shown conclusively that rockets couldn't get out to space the same way it was worked out that steamships couldn't cross the ocean because the coal consumption would be too great; or, that airplanes obviously weighed so much they could never get off the

ground. It seems to me that this kind of logic defeats the skeptic at his own game.

Morgan Harris
Littlejohn Lane
Cooksville, Ont., Canada

Fortunately we'll live to see a ship from Earth reach Luna—which will put the skeptics in their place for good. As for covers, hope we'll be able to please you shortly. Is the reader section in this issue long enough? . . . wlh

MYTHS IN STF

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The May issue of *Madge* was very good—with a few exceptions, of course. The title of St. Reynard's novel would look a lot better on a child's fairy tale. The story was all right, but did the giants have to be djinni, and did Atlantis have to be thrown in? It is getting very boring to have myths in science fiction.

The cover was atrocious. As far as I'm concerned, it didn't illustrate anything in the story. There was a giant riding a space ship certainly, but there were no small interceptors shooting at him and no fire on the space ship. And, besides that, the cover would discourage any buyer who was not familiar with *Madge* and maybe some who were.

COSMIC SANTA CLAUS by Daniel F. Galouye was terrific. You can keep Galouye, even if his name is difficult to pronounce!

Does Henry Bott like all the books he reviews? "Candidly" should be withdrawn from your explanation of the reviewing column . . .

To Ray Schaffer, Jr.: Is it impossible to name *one* invention or scientific concept in reality today that was not mentioned in a stf magazine prior to this date?

William Deeck
8400 Potomac Ave.
College Park, Md.

Myths can be reasonably acceptable in a stf magazine since by their very nature they are in the fantasy category—and science fiction in its broad term includes fantasy, thus the term, science-fantasy. However, we're sure you won't find myths as the basis for many stories presented in Madge. It so happened that St. Reynard thought his idea was a very good way to explain the ancient djinni wlh

NEWSSTAND STUDY

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I'm quite convinced that IMAGINATION is one of the two best magazines in the science fiction field. My other selection may surprise you. This opinion derives from a study of the various magazines. It seems not at all mysterious that a number of them have folded. After twenty years of various types of scribbling, a writer gets to know his readers pretty well. Most of these magazines simply had no idea of what the public likes to read.

This is how I make my study: I first look over the display of science fiction magazines in the average newsstand. This indicates the public demand and the amount of effort the publisher is using to push his sales. Month to month consistency

tells a lot. IMAGINATION was high in demand but low in regional promotion.

Next I look at the covers. This indicates the personality of the editor. Madge was tops.

Next I leaf through the pages. The format usually confirms the cover type. Then I read paragraphs here and there. If I note that the authors are more interested in holding the reader in suspense than in using fancy expressions, I buy the magazine.

Later I determine how much the authors stick to scientific facts, or branch off with logical imagination. A stupid story hurts a reader. Galaxy, for one, has pulled a lot of boners lately. A few boners can be oversights, but a reader will not accept too many.

Among the authors who have really learned the art of suspense are Robert A Heinlein, Evan Hunter, Alan E. Nourse, and Hal Annas. There are others, of course.

Oh, yes, as I started out saying, the two best magazines in the field in my opinion are, IMAGINATION and IF..

Lowell G. Stone
340 Broad St.
Elyria, Ohio

Sales promotion on the part of the publisher is difficult since the type of promotion you need to be effective in every city costs quite a bit of money. Therefore, most publishers rely on their distributor to do a good job of displaying their magazines. The American News Company, distributor of IMAGINATION, does a fine job and wherever we go we usually see Madge

prominently displayed. . . . wh

WISCONSIN FANS NOTE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Maybe you're getting tired of being told how good *Madge* is, so I'll just mention it in passing. I liked THE GIANTS FROM OUTER SPACE in the May issue, but then I always enjoy a St. Reynard story. The shorts ranged from fair to very good. I don't think I've read a really bad story in IMAGINATION yet!

I'd like to contact fans in the Wisconsin area—object forming a fan club. I'm sure Wisconsin has a lot of fans but I don't believe the state has an active science fiction organization. I will appreciate hearing from anybody interested.

By the way, I enjoy FANDORA'S BOX a lot. This column really got me started as an active fan!

Ralph Hickok
1869 Preble Ave.
Green Bay, Wisc.

Come now, Ralph, we never get tired of hearing how good *Madge* is! Hope we'll continue to merit your praise wh

ELECTRONIC SPACE DRIVE ...?

Dear Ed:

I am afraid I must agree wholeheartedly with Ernest Wolf of Vienna, Austria, in that the future space ships need not be shot off the Earth and left to drift with no fuel left. Afterall, you can go only so far with carrying liquid fuel, which

makes the whole idea highly impractical.

The future space ships (not too far distant future either) will be strictly electronically powered (without atomics) and capable of, as Mr. Wolf says, taking off gradually without breaking anyone's neck, and then applying more power once gravitational attraction is overcome. I believe such ships will be capable of achieving the speed of light—perhaps within 10,000 miles after leaving Earth.

Sound fantastic? This, I think you'll find, is an entirely new concept in space drives. But stick around, you'll see it come to pass.

Richard Olinger
1029 N. 14th St.
Apt. 406
Milwaukee, Wisc.

We'll stick around! wh

EMPTY PROMISE?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The May issue of *Madge* was, as usual, received and read with the greatest of pleasure. St. Reynard was at his usual high level and the other stories were also good—almost good enough to compensate for the missing 32 pages! The loss was regretted, but of course it can be put up with.

From the letter section I see that John Courtois is adding his bit to the controversy about the difference between mere reader and fan. Semantically, the controversy is senseless; the definitions are so elusive that everyone has his own. From that, the logical conclusion is that a person becomes a fan as soon as

he himself thinks so. Fair enough?

A further comment on the letter section. Sure, an editor likes to mention what will be in coming issues. But when you apparently jump at every chance to make repeated promises in your replies to letters, a limit has been reached and passed. Classic example: October '52 issue had three separate promises of a new TOFFEE story soon.

In closing I will mention that about a year ago you mentioned the possibility of a personals column in Madge. Surely you can spare a page—why am I mentioning this? Well, I still lack the first six issues of Madge! Anybody got them?

Dainis Bisenieks
336 S. Warren

Saginaw, Mich.

You'll find a book-length TOFFEE novel in the first issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES, now on sale. Run to your newsdealer! And further, there'll be a new TOFFEE story coming up in Madge soon too—no empty promise, we promise! ...wh

KEEPING FANDOM ALIVE!

Dear Ed:

Just finished reading the letter section in the May issue of *Madge*. After reading through them I have come to the conclusion that almost all the letters follow one of two themes. First either praising you to high heaven, or second, giving you holy hell for stomping on one

LITTLE LUNCEFORD



"Think how proud your folks will be
to have a son who flew to the moon."

of their pet grievances. Rarely have I seen any constructive criticism.

I really enjoyed Ernest Wolf's comments on American science fiction. Hope to see others from him and fans from other countries. They are always interesting and let us know how other people think about us.

Stf has always had a vocabulary of its own, but lately some of the words coined by fans and authors have been horrible. Now wait a sec, don't shoot me, I never said new words weren't necessary, just that there are too many on the market now.

I refuse to get into the argument on the amount of adornment for the gentler sex. I will admit that some

of the covers are falling into a rut. One last comment. Don't ever drop FANDORA'S BOX. It has kept fandom alive. Also, I heartily agree with John Courtois. Fandom would get a much needed shot in the arm if more people would write to the magazines and to the letter writers.

Jack Zeitz

1300 Medary Ave.

Philadelphia 41, Pa.

Correspondence always creates and sustains interest—so we agree with you, the more letters the better! Which about winds up shop for this month. Don't forget the special free book offer on the next page, and also, get the first issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES with the great TOFFEE novel at your newsdealer today! wlh

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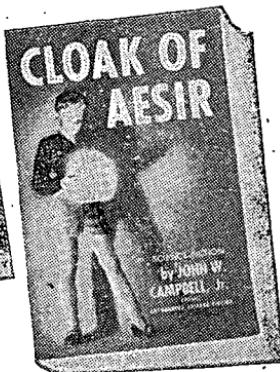
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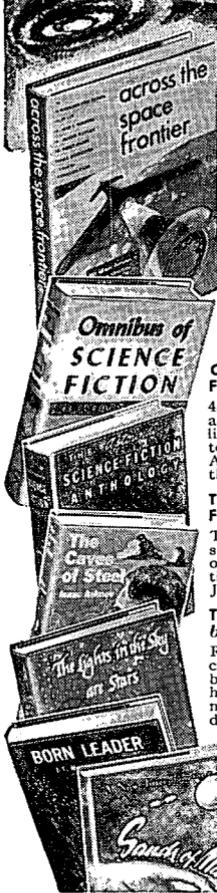
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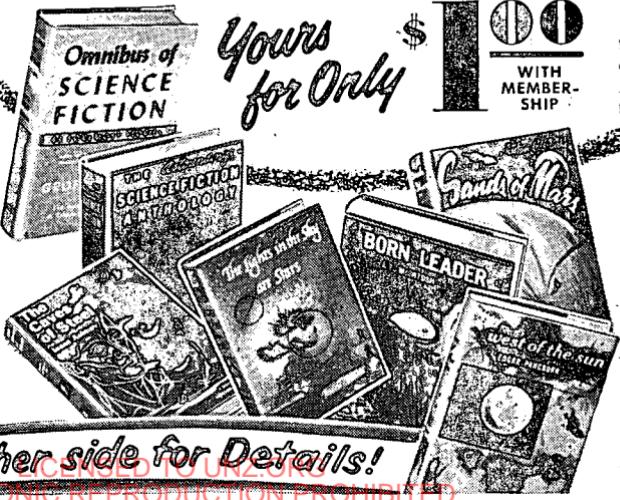
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